

**AFRICANIZING WORSHIP  
IN THE MISSION CHURCHES OF AFRICA**

**A Professional Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by  
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## ABSTRACT

### Africanizing Worship in the Mission Churches of Africa by

Richard Edward Brown-Whale

Contextual theology and the Africanizing of worship have become important issues in African Christianity. This study examines what is involved in integrating contextual African theologies with concerns for contextualizing worship. Beginning with the premise of liturgical theology that worship communicates and informs theology, this study looks at how worship might communicate and inform African theologies and vice versa.

After an introductory chapter, the second chapter introduces the context of mission Christianity in Africa. While recognizing the vast diversity of Africa, the chapter presumes some commonality among African peoples.

The third chapter introduces the reader to liturgical theology and clarifies its premises.

The African independent church movement is described in the fourth chapter as a source for Africanized theology and worship, albeit not a source which can be used indiscriminately.

An introduction to African Christian theologians is given in the fifth and sixth chapters. The fifth chapter focuses on issues of methodology. The sixth chapter looks at a sampling of African theologians. In these two chapters, the division between those theologians who stress



liberation and those who emphasize indigenization is explained. These chapters note a movement toward integration of these two concerns and supports the position that true Africanization must address both issues.

Chapter seven addresses selected issues of liturgical Africanization. It does not attempt to delineate Africanized worship, but only to raise the issues which must be faced by those who will Africanize it.

The last chapter looks at some contributions an Africanized church in Africa could offer to the world-wide Christian movement and suggests that there is much the West, especially, can learn from the African church.

This is a library study dependent, as much as possible, on African sources. It is meant to aid anyone interested in issues of contextualizing worship anywhere in the world, but especially those working in the mission churches of Africa.

## PREFACE

The issues and concerns raised in this study regarding Africa first arose, for me, in a different context.

I am a United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries World Division missionary who has been serving with the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas.

While doing so, I became quite fascinated by the worship life of the Methodist peoples of the West Indies. Both of the circuits in which my wife and I worked shared the similar history of having been formerly British and, as a result, of being formally British when it came to worship. Somehow, worship had not been inculturated in the Caribbean experience. What happened, therefore, in worship on Sunday was far removed from the weekday lives of the people. I began to wonder whether a Caribbeanization of liturgy might not result in renewal for the church in many important ways.

That African theologians are calling for the Africanization of liturgy suggests to me that the issues and concerns of this study are relevant to many different contexts, including that of the North American church. I do hope that this study will prove helpful to those working in the African context, but also to others who might ask the same questions in whatever context they are working for Christ.

Several people have made significant contributions to

the development of this study. I would like to thank persons such as the Rev. Russell McClatchey, who first opened my eyes to the global nature of the church, and Dr. Letty Russell, who introduced me to contextual theologies. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance of several faculty members at the School of Theology at Claremont: Drs. Marjorie Suchocki, Park Sung, Allen Moore, Jon Olson; my D.Min. committee: Drs. Stephen Kim (chairman) and Cornish Rogers; and thesis secretary Elaine Walker.

Acknowledgement must also be given to the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries and the many local congregations who support my work for encouraging, allowing, and enabling me to pursue this study.

Finally, I must acknowledge my family, especially my wife, Kimberly, without whose help, encouragement, patience, and understanding this study would not have been completed.

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*I would like to dedicate this  
to my wonderful wife, Kimberly.*

*My love and respect for her grows each day.  
I am glad to be her partner in God's mission!*

## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Euro-American missionaries, while accomplishing much good in the spread of Christianity to Africa, also imposed some non-essential aspects of their Christian experience on their converts as if those elements were essential to Christianity and normative for all people. As a result, in recent years, many indigenous African contextual theologians have maintained that indigenization is the most important task of the African churches.

The modern missionary movement in Africa coincided with the expansion of European colonialism. The spread of the gospel, unfortunately, therefore, occurred concurrently with the spread of political oppression and racism. While these missionaries often fought hard against the slave trade, they failed to recognize Christ their brother in the African people. Some African Christian theologians have, therefore, stressed the socio-political context as the basis for doing theology. These have maintained that liberation is more important than indigenization.

Yet other African Christian theologians are emphasizing as integration between cultural and political contexts as the basis for doing truly contextual theology. Such an integrated approach is necessary for the Africanization of the mission churches of Africa. Since worship communicates and informs theology, these new contextual theologies must result in new worship practices.



This project examines emerging African theologies and their implications for the Africanization of worship in the African mission churches. In addition, the raw materials of contextual theology must also be examined. The study, therefore, looks as well to the historical background of Christianity in Africa, to African traditional religions, and to the independent African churches.

The project clarifies the theological issues of Africanizing worship for the African mission churches. As an outsider, the author was careful not to be too presumptuous. The author of this study, therefore, serves more as a reporter sharing descriptively than as one giving advice prescriptively. This study is most prescriptive when speaking of the ways Western Christianity can learn from the church in Africa.

While this project is addressed primarily to the missionary community, the basic issues raised here about indigenization should prove helpful in other contexts as well.

### Importance of the Issue

The failure and reluctance of the African mission churches to Africanize theology and worship have had and continue to have serious consequences for the ability of these churches to participate effectively in the carrying out of their mission mandate.

Specifically, Africanization is needed for a more authentic Christian faith for Africa. The failure to fully

contextualize theology and worship in the African mission churches has resulted in the alienation of African Christians from their full humanity and of many Africans from Christ. Even the small attempts at Africanizing the mission churches which have been made to date have resulted in such rapid growth of the church in Africa that one can scarcely imagine the result of a fully Africanized Christianity on that great continent.

For a more authentic Christian faith for Africans, a contextual theology and indigenous worship must be integrated; thus, the need for a study such as this which examines the implications of emerging African theologies for indigenous worship.

It must be kept in mind that Africanization is not needed for the sake of novelty or even relevancy, but for the sake of faithfulness to Christ, the Lord of the church, who must, for the Africans, be African, and whose church must, therefore, for the Africans, be African.

### Thesis

Worship plays an important function in forming and communicating theology. Regardless of the context, there must, therefore, be an integrity between the two. This study examines emerging African theologies in order to determine what these theologies imply for the Africanization of worship in the African mission churches. This project contributes to the process of contextualization by clarifying what the theological and

practical issues involved in Africanizing worship are for the African mission churches.

### Descriptions of Major Terms

There are a few terms used in this study which need to be described. These terms are not used the same way by all writers. It would, therefore, be helpful for the reader to understand how this study employs these terms. This should lessen misunderstanding.

#### Africa

The term Africa will be used as a shorthand for sub-Saharan Africa. Through a complex network of cause and effect, northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa have developed in separate directions. While both are still African, this study is limited to sub-Saharan Africa, but will use the term Africa as if it only included that part of the continent south of the Sahara.

#### Indigenization, Contextualization, and Africanization

The context of this project is specifically Christian. Indigenization is, therefore, herein understood as the process of developing theology, worship, and other elements of Christian faith and practice from the context of a specific culture. Indigenization goes beyond mere translation or adaptation which only touch the surface of cultural differences.

Localization, indigenization, inculturation, and contextualization, while having slightly different nuances,

are basically equivalent terms. This study uses the term indigenization when dealing with an emphasis on culture and the term contextualization when dealing with both cultural and socio-political contexts. This is despite Robert Schreiter's comment that indigenization has colonial connotations in East Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Africanization is a sub-set of contextualization, referring to the contextualization of worship, theology, and polity within the specific context, both cultural and socio-political of sub-Saharan Africa.

#### Worship and Liturgy

While sometimes liturgy is used exclusively to refer only to the Eucharist or to specific set patterns of worship, worship and liturgy will be used synonymously.

On the other hand, worship is sometimes used quite widely to refer to any word, thought, or action which glorifies God. In this study, the term worship is employed in its more common usage as showing reverence to God in a corporate church service.

#### African Mission Churches

By using this term, the scope of the project is limited to those mainline churches which are located in Africa and, while now autonomous churches with indigenous leadership, have their roots in the work of the British, European, and North American missionary movement.

### African Independent Churches

These churches claim to be Christian, although others might define some of them as syncretistic. They are of African origin with indigenous leadership.

### African Theologies

In recent years, many indigenous African theologians, mainly from the mission churches, have begun trying to answer the questions: "What would a specifically African Christian theology look like?" and "What does our Africanness contribute to our understanding of Christ?"

These African theologians are engaging in contextual theology similar in methodology to Black theology, feminist theology, Latin American liberation theology, *minjung* theology, and the like.

When the term African theologies is used, it is employed as a shorthand for African Christian theologies. It is not used to refer to theologies which might be attributed to traditional African religions nor to deny that such religions might have their own theologies.

### Work Previously Done in the Field

Liturgical theology has been developing as a particular field of theology. Liturgical theology emphasizes the integration of worship practices and theology with a primacy being given to the worship practices. It is based on the notion that what we believe is influenced by what we do. This study uses scholarship in this field to explicate the thesis that Africanized

theology and Africanized worship must be integrated. This study, therefore, uses the work of such scholars as Alexander Schmemmann, Frank Senn, Regin Prenter, Paul Hoon, and Geoffrey Wainwright to help provide an important framework for theologically examining the issues involved in contextual worship.

African contextual theology is emerging throughout the continent. Much of this theology focuses on the need for indigenization. This study examines this theological approach by using the works of John Mbiti, Jean-Marc Éla, Kwesi Dickson, E. Bolaji Idowu, John Pobee, Edward Fasholé-Luke, and Harry Sawyerr.

Other African theologians are placing the emphasis more on liberation. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a Ghanaian woman, has challenged the work of those African theologians concerned solely with indigenization by employing a feminist perspective. The South African theologians, while quite specific to the context of apartheid, also add a concern for issues of justice to the concern for indigenization.

Besides the African theologians themselves, there are a few studies of these theologies and of contextual theology in general which are important to this project. The scholars involved here are persons such as Aylward Shorter, Robert Schreiter, Josiah Young, Robert Hood, and Hans-Jürgen Becken.

It is important to consider the African independent churches. There have been good studies of these churches, such as *The Churches of Africa: Future Prospects*, edited by Claude Geffré and Bertrand Luneau; *African Independent Church Movements*, edited by Hayward Victor; *The New Religions of Africa*, edited by Bennetta Jules-Rosette; *Afro-Christian Religions and Post-Christianity in Africa* by G. C. Oosthuizen and *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity* by Nya Kwiawon Taryor. These are also employed.

My contribution to the work already done is in the synthesis of these materials and, in particular, in using the premise of liturgical theology to examine and illuminate the theological issues involved in Africanizing worship in the mission churches of Africa. This study does not propose to specifically map out liturgies for these churches nor even to offer expert advice as to the directions they should take. The author of this study has simply tried to be a good listener and reporter and thinker. The author has entered into a dialogue with those scholars who are concerned with these issues and believes that this study contributes to current scholarship by encouraging others to do the same for whatever context in which they are planning and leading worship.

#### Scope and Limitations

This project involves a survey of the present state of African theology. This survey attempts to present a

sampling of theologians who are stressing cultural indigenization, those who are emphasizing socio-political liberation, and those who propose an integration of the two (as does the author of this study). This is simply a sampling and has no scientific basis to it. No specific criteria were used to decide who was included and who was not other than a desire to include the foremost theologians in Africa today.

This project focuses on the mission churches because of the author's own work in United Methodist global ministries and because there is value in maintaining ties with historical Christianity. These ties, however, need not constrict creativity and faithfulness, but, instead, should enable a richer dialogue between tradition and current context.

Again, the final conclusions are not complete liturgies nor even specific directions for Africanization of worship in the African mission churches. This study is most pointed when highlighting what authentically African worship would offer to the global church.

#### Integration and Methodology

This project is a descriptive one in which the primary tool used was library research. This study describes the context of the African church, including discussion of the independent churches, traditional African cultures and religions, and the history of Christianity on this continent. It describes the principles of liturgical



theology which function as the presuppositions for this work. It includes a survey of the work of the principal African theologians in order to compare and contrast their work, and examines various liturgical issues in light of the above discussion. Finally, this study points to some contributions Africanized Christianity could make to the world church.

## NOTE

## Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), 5.

## CHAPTER 2

## Africa: Understanding the Context

Harold Guite, a British Methodist layman who taught at universities in Nigeria and in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) visited an English-speaking congregation. He described it as an English church in its architecture, its hymnody, its use of the organ, and its style of worship. He records:

Long before the fourth hymn I realised with mounting dread that the sermon was going to be the same sermon, both in content and idiom that I had endured so often.... What distressed me was the exact replication in Africa of an English culture.<sup>1</sup>

Such an observation points to the serious need for the indigenization of liturgy in Africa. Even more important, however, than the observation of an outsider is the cry of the African people themselves for indigenization.

Nya Kwiawon Taryor, Sr., a Liberian United Methodist states, "If Christianity in Africa is to become effective and meaningful, it must become an indigenous religion of Africa; it must be rooted in the African soil and culture; and it must be capable of dealing with the issues and problems of Africa."<sup>2</sup>

Such a statement comes out of an awareness that Christianity is perceived by many Africans as a foreign entity, brought by Europeans and Americans, which failed to indigenize or incarnate itself into the culture.<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the need for indigenization is one thing. Accomplishing it in a fashion which is faithful both to the context and the Christian faith is a much more difficult

matter. The author confesses that, upon entering into this study, he imagined that indigenization would mean worshipping in the vernacular with the use of traditional musical instruments, dance, and African style vestments. The author now understands that this would just be scratching the surface for "Africanness is something of the heart as well."<sup>4</sup>

True indigenization requires far more than changing a few externals. It requires plumbing the depths of the African cultures, traditional religions, and current socio-economic and political conditions. It also requires critical reflection upon the Christianity presented by the mission churches, exercising a "hermeneutic of suspicion" regarding the form of Christianity they offer.<sup>5</sup>

The goal is, not just an indigenous African liturgy, but an indigenous African liturgy firmly rooted in indigenous African theology and able to respond to the realities of life in Africa.

This study, therefore, looks first to Africa in an attempt to better understand the context under discussion.

#### The Great Continent

A warning is now needed with regard to this study in particular and to any study of Africa in general. It is a warning couched in the simple reminder that Africa is immense and, as such, is amazingly diverse. About half a billion people live on this continent which has an area of over thirty million square kilometers. The peoples of

Africa live in fifty-two different countries and speak over one thousand languages and even more dialects.<sup>6</sup>

A glance at a physical map of this great continent reveals a continent stretching from latitude 37 degrees north to 35 degrees south. Upon that continent, one sees evidence of vast stretches of desert, thick rain forest, open veldt, and high mountains. One can go from Lake Assal in Djibouti at 156 meters below sea level to Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania at 5,895 meters above sea level. Africa contains Dalol in Ethiopia, the hottest place on earth, and Mt. Kilimanjaro with its continual snow and ice. This climatic variety contributes to the existence, in Africa, of an incredible array of peoples and cultures.<sup>7</sup>

One must be very careful not to over-simplify matters when dealing with something so diverse. John Pobee tells us, therefore, that we must be careful to speak of African religions and African traditions and, therefore, of African theologies. Because liturgy and theology must be integrated, in the end, one must, therefore, also talk about indigenous African liturgies.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, this study needs to call attention to the current situation in Africa. Africa today is beset with famine, drought, civil war, disease (including AIDS), human rights violations, apartheid, poverty, corruption, rapid change, urbanization, and bureaucratic bumbling.

Ali A. Mazrui credits the failure of the twentieth century European world view to mesh with the African world

view, the "dis-Africanising" of Africa, for this collapse and decay. He says that it is as if the ancestors had pronounced a curse over Africa which the current generation is now hearing:

Warriors will fight scribes for the control of your institutions; wild bush will conquer your roads and pathways; your land will yield less and less while your offspring multiply; your houses will leak from the floods and your soil will crack from the drought; your sons will refuse to pick up the hoe and prefer to wander in the wilds; you shall learn ways of cheating and you will poison the cola nuts you serve your own friends. Yes, things will fall apart.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever occurs in liturgical developments in the course of indigenizing, these social and political issues will have to be addressed if the developed theologies and liturgies are to be relevant and authentic for Africa today. The war of cultures between traditional African and Western civilization must come to a proper peace settlement. That peace should begin first and foremost in the church.<sup>10</sup>

### African History

The lack of a written, preserved archival tradition makes the re-telling of African history quite difficult. Mazrui notes that those who do attempt such a narration tend to emphasize either the glorious empires ("romantic gloriana") or the simple, non-technical primitive societies ("romantic primitivism"). The former offer such an emphasis as a corrective to European arrogance which assumes Africans to be incapable of such empire building. The latter prefer to counter this European arrogance by eschewing European values and valuing African simplicity rather than buying

into them. Both perspectives are needed to balance the other if one is to obtain an accurate picture of African history.<sup>11</sup>

African history begins with the history of humanity. Humans are now believed to have originated in the East African rift system about 2.5 million years ago. The human species in Africa reached the stage of *Homo sapiens sapiens* 100,000 years earlier than in Europe and Asia (about 40,000 B.C.).<sup>12</sup>

Throughout prehistoric times, Africa led the world in technological advancement. The first cultivation probably occurred in the upper Nile 10,000 - 16,000 years ago. Pastoralism probably began as early as 7,000 B.C.<sup>13</sup> Copper smelting seems to have begun by 800 B.C. and iron smelting by 500 B.C. By the fifth century A.D. nearly all Africans were Iron Age farmers and by the tenth century A.D., this was true of all but the Khosoi and San hunter-gatherers of southwest Africa. In contrast, when Australia was discovered, they were at a stage of using stone tools reached by Africans 6,000 - 9,000 years earlier. The most advanced of native Americans were, in the sixteenth century, using polished stone tools.<sup>14</sup>

Between 5,000 and 4,000 B.C., the Nile valley saw the establishment of permanent settlements and the rapid development of dynastic Egypt. Over the centuries, Egypt would have a great influence of the rest of Africa and vice versa. For example, in the late second millenium B.C., the

kingdom of Kush was conquered and administered by Egypt. In the eighth century B.C., Kush would conquer Egypt. Five of the pharaohs of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty were Kushites.<sup>15</sup>

North Africa would, however, be influenced in the seventh century with the "twin processes" of Islamisation (a religious conversion to the creed of Muhammed) and Arabisation (a linguistic assimilation into the language of the Arabs). These processes would result in North Africans seeing themselves as Arabs and not as Africans.<sup>16</sup>

Sub-Saharan kingdoms soon developed as well. The eighth century A.D. Arabic geographer, al-Farazi, refers to the kingdom of Ghana in his writings. It was probably the most important of the west African Iron Age states at its height during the period A.D. 400 - 1050. It controlled most of the gold trade of the western Sudan.<sup>17</sup>

Long before Europeans set foot in sub-Saharan Africa, trade routes were well-established. The slave trade was already being practiced by the Arabs by the ninth century A.D. It would, however, only become a large-scale operation in the sixteenth century when Europeans became involved. By the time slavery ended, around 12 million Africans had been sold into slavery.<sup>18</sup>

The result of the slave trade was to move the center of trading away from the Sudan to coastal West Africa. Few Europeans ventured further than this, being content simply to buy and transport slaves from the West Africans



themselves. The Portugese went so far as to train and arm Angolan tribesmen for raids against other tribes.<sup>19</sup>

The abolition of slavery was completed in most European and American countries by the 1880s. The end of slavery, however, meant that Europeans now ventured far and wide throughout Africa in search of new exports.<sup>20</sup>

In 1879, the French were in control of Algiers, Tunis, Senegal, and Cape Verde and were advancing into the Sudan. The British had control of the Gold Coast, Lagos, Sierra Leone, and South Africa (Cape Colony, Transvaal, Natal, and Basutoland). The Portugese controlled Angola and Moçambique. Most of Africa still lay outside of European domination.<sup>21</sup>

Historians disagree about the cause of the rush to colonize Africa. Some say that this scramble began after 1875 when Leopold II of Belgium moved to make the Congo basin his own personal colony. Others state that it originated in 1879 when the French started constructing a railroad from Dakar. Others still date its commencement as 1883 when Germany began the annexation of South-West Africa, Togoland, Cameroon, and East Africa and then called for the Berlin Conference in 1884 to partition Africa.<sup>22</sup>

According to Oliver and Fage, at the beginning of the colonial period, the colonial powers desired to pay as little as possible in maintaining colonies under their control. They were not interested in the development of their colonies. Any development which did occur, such as

schools and medical clinics occurred as a result of missionary effort.<sup>23</sup>

The classical colonial period was between the two World Wars. This is when colonial powers, despite resistance, were at their height. This, however, was also the period during which African nationalists were being trained. These persons soon led their countries to independence.<sup>24</sup>

Beginning with the independence of the Republic of Ghana in 1957, the colonial period would quickly come to an end. One after another, African nations became independent. By the end of the 1980s, all were independent. The colonial period had lasted less than one hundred years.<sup>25</sup>

Since independence, nations have struggled with the massive change which has occurred in a relatively short period of time. It has been a turbulent time and an exciting time as Africa finds itself.

### The History of Christianity in Africa

It will be important to have an overview of the history of Christianity on the continent of Africa. While the purpose of this project is not to critique the past performance of mission churches, but to consider positive actions for the future, part of the African context is wrapped up in this history and the perceptions of Africans with regards to it.

A Ugandan will remind you that Jesus drank Ugandan water, since water from Uganda went down the Nile to Egypt, and Jesus' mother, the Blessed Virgin, drank it and gave him milk.<sup>26</sup>

With those words, Noel King begins to tell the story of Christianity's arrival in Africa. He chooses those words to show that there is a deep connection between Christianity and Africa which is much older than the nineteenth century European and North American missionary movement.

Christianity first came to Africa through Egypt. Taryor makes reference to the legend that St. Mark arrived there prior to A.D. 100. By the later half of the second century A.D., Alexandria emerged as a major center of Christianity in the world. While Egyptian Christianity would be virtually destroyed by A.D. 638 with the invasion of the Arab Muslims, the church there made significant contributions to the world church. For example, the Egyptian Church sent missionaries to Ethiopia and Nubia (Sudan) in A.D. 500-600, developed the foundations of the monastic movement, and offered several saints to the church.<sup>27</sup>

Ethiopian Christianity had strong ties with Egypt. When Egypt was conquered by the Muslims, Ethiopia was cut off. In its isolation, the Ethiopian Church developed its own church architecture, religious art, liturgy, and theology. Because many of the independent churches this study examines later look to the Ethiopian Church as a model, it is worth a moment to describe this church.<sup>28</sup>

The Ethiopian Church broke with the Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches in A.D. 451. The break was over the nature of Christ. The Ethiopian Church held to monophysism

which states that Christ had only one nature (his human nature was perfectly absorbed into his divine nature).<sup>29</sup>

At the center of each church building, ranging from those carved out of solid rock to little village churches, is a *tabot*, a consecrated slab on which the Eucharist is offered. The sanctuary around it is circular; the innermost part of which may only be entered by priests in ritual purity.<sup>30</sup>

John Mbiti refers to the Ethiopian Coptic Church as authentically African since its form and practices have evolved over many centuries without interference from others.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the church in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nubia (Sudan), the church also grew rapidly in northwestern Africa (Africa Proconsularis of the Romans). Christianity appeared here about A.D. 180. These churches became extremely important to the formation of Christian doctrine. This part of the world gave the church Tertullian who helped with developing the doctrine of the Trinity and of biphysism (two natures, divine and human, in one person). This region also offered the church Cyprian, Origen, Augustine, Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, and St. Anthony.<sup>32</sup>

Geography prevented the spread of Christianity beyond North Africa and Ethiopia. The advent of Islam in Africa resulted in a serious decline in the Christian church in North Africa. It was not until the fifteenth century and

beyond before most Africans came into contact with the Christian gospel.<sup>33</sup>

Because of this early history of the Christian presence in Africa, John Mbiti, Geoffrey Parrinder, and others refer to Christianity as indigenous to Africa. These same people, however, remind their readers that when Christianity returned for another try, it came in a European form. Thus, there is still a need to talk about indigenizing Christianity for Africa.<sup>34</sup>

By the end of the fifteenth century, Portuguese missionaries reached the west coast of Africa. They came with Portuguese traders who travelled up and down the coast. They worked under the protection of Portuguese soldiers celebrating the Eucharist with Africans while Portuguese slavers carried on their hideous trade. The Portuguese also established trading posts and churches on the east coast and in the south.<sup>35</sup>

The slave trade, colonialism, and the failure of European missionaries to distinguish European cultural assumptions from Christian teachings all united to rob Africans of their humanity. Such a form of Christianity could not possibly be authentic for Africans. There is, therefore, a great need for liberative and Africanized worship in Africa.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europe's contact with Africa was almost entirely commercial. As early as A.D. 1787, however, the church was being

established in Sierre Leone among freed slaves. From here and from Liberia, established in A.D. 1822, black missionaries reached out to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Notable among these were Thomas Birch Freeman who went to the Gold Coast (Ghana) in A.D. 1838 and Samuel Adjai Crowther who went to his native Nigeria.<sup>36</sup>

As the nineteenth century wore on, missionary activities expanded greatly. Unfortunately, this occurred simultaneously with the expansion of colonial occupation. The connection between the missionary movement and growing colonialism was not accidental for, in the words of the great David Livingstone, "I go to... Africa to make an open path for commerce and Christianity."<sup>37</sup>

During this period of Africa's history, while Europeans imposed unjust policies and white supremacist attitudes upon the Africans, European and American missionaries not only failed to speak prophetically for justice and humanity, but militantly struggled to erase traditional African beliefs and practices. Josiah Young says, "Rather than use traditional concepts to explain the new faith, missionaries sought to eclipse them."<sup>38</sup>

Early missionaries did not attempt to understand and appreciate the indigenous culture into which they were attempting to bring the gospel. Africans were, to them, only savages to whom, not only Christianity, but civilization itself must be brought. That great civilizations existed in Africa prior to and at the time of

the arrival of the Europeans is now a matter of common knowledge. The Euro-centric bias of the missionaries, who denied that those who were not European in custom and outlook could possibly possess any aspect of civilization, is also widely acknowledged.

It is this history which has created the context in Africa today wherein the mission churches need to create indigenous African theologies and liturgical forms. "Christianity came to Africa in European garb." Using this image, the task of the churches in Africa today is to undress European Christianity and re-dress it in African garb.<sup>39</sup>

This brief overview of the history of Africa is not yet complete. During the period between World War I and II, the independence movement flourished. This movement was the formation of independent indigenous churches. Many scholars consider this movement a protest against colonialism, while others consider it a protest against the missionary movement's attack on African culture. Both are probably true since, as already noted, the two went hand in hand during this period. Regardless, the mission churches will have to take a serious look at these independent churches.<sup>40</sup>

After World War II, the European colonial powers began to realize that their structure of colonialism was soon to disappear. Maintaining colonies was no longer cost effective. The United Nations applied pressure to see colonialism end. African nationalism, to some degree

fostered by the African Christian churches, emerged. Soon the death knell to colonialism was sounded throughout most of Africa. The political independence of Africa led to a greater concern in the traditional mission churches for autonomy and Africanization.

While most African theologians have been focusing on the question of indigenization, concerns about poverty, neocolonialism, apartheid, tyranny, and inter-tribal strife are leading many African theologians to a concern for liberation as well. This concern cannot, however, be equated with liberation theology in Latin America or with black theology in North America. The primary difference is a concern that liberation move on to reconciliation. Obviously, a further discussion of this is needed and it will be provided later. Before reaching the point of considering African Christian theology, however, this study looks at traditional African religion.<sup>41</sup>

#### African Religious Traditions

There is no one African religious tradition. One can only speak of traditions. Some scholars, however, suggest that there are enough elements common to the various religions to be able to speak of an African world view. King who studied African religions for more than three decades was "impressed by how much spiritual unity there is amid African diversity."<sup>42</sup>

Even while John Pobee warns of the danger of too easily assuming similarity between tribal traditions, he,



nonetheless, deals with the Akan religion as a paradigm for all African religion.<sup>43</sup> In a similar approach, Josiah Young, drawing on the work of John Mbiti, Vincent Mulago, and Bolaji Idowu, states, "in spite of differences, a certain unanimity of belief is evident."<sup>44</sup>

The author of this study joins others in risking an over-simplification by speaking of an African religious world view, by which is meant the common elements found in most African religions. In this chapter, the Akans are used to assist in describing what seem to be common themes.

Pobee identifies as primary to Akan society the all-pervasiveness of religion. He earlier stated that all African traditional life is marked by a religious perspective.<sup>45</sup>

According to Akan belief, a person is surrounded by spirit-beings who can and do influence human life. Therefore, their goodwill is constantly sought. All of life is dependent on the spirit world. There are three levels or types of spirit-beings: the Supreme Being, ancestors, and other gods.<sup>46</sup>

The first of these spirit-beings is the Supreme God, *Onyame*. This God is ineffable and transcendent and, yet, immanently involved in people's lives. As an Akan proverb says, "It is *Onyame*, *Onyame*, who flaps the flies for the tailless cow."<sup>47</sup>

Because this God is not to be approached lightly, *Onyame* has delegated authority to the *abosom* (gods) and to

the *mpanyinfo* or *nananom'samanfo* (the ancestors). These act in place of God and on behalf of God.<sup>48</sup>

The use of the Akan view of *Onyame* as paradigmatic for the African view of the Supreme Being is supported by John Mbiti's study of three hundred ethnic groups across Africa. Mbiti concluded that Africans see God as wholly Other, as "utterly transcendent but nonetheless immanent.... omniscient, omnipotent, ubiquitous, and unequivocally holy."<sup>49</sup>

Many African Christian theologians defend traditional African religion as monotheistic. E. Bolaji Idowu, for one, sees traditional religion as monotheistic since the lesser divinities and ancestors only have a derivative existence.<sup>50</sup>

Kwesi Dickson, however, believes that the terms polytheism and monotheism are not accurate enough for discussion of African traditional religion, while Benjamin C. Ray says that, "Recent studies suggest that African religions are better understood as involving elements of these schemes (monotheism, polytheism, pantheism) at different theological levels and in different contexts of experience."<sup>51</sup>

Mazrui clarifies this by describing the Nilotic concept of a force which pervades and unifies all of nature. The Luo call this force *Jok*. Bethwell A. Ogot defines *Jok* as "the essence of every being, the force which makes everything what it is, and God himself, the greatest *Jok*, is life-force itself."<sup>52</sup> While God is indeed singular, the

same *Jok* which fills God fills everything. This is monotheism with a twist. The most significant twist is in the way the belief is used. Mazrui describes monotheism as leading to an elevation of *homo sapiens* above and away from the rest of nature. Such a divided status has enabled the wholesale destruction of the environment among other things. The African view, however, is unifying. Human beings share the same life-force with every animal, rock, plant, ancestor, and divinity. This leads to a symbiotic relationship with nature and an awareness that the human being is but one manifestation of this life-force.<sup>53</sup>

The ancestors are the deceased who are perceived as living on in another world still very much in contact with this world. They beneficently watch over the affairs of their living relatives and influence life so as to reward goodness and to punish wickedness.<sup>54</sup>

The third level of spirit-beings are the *abosom*, i.e., the lesser deities. These gods are "*Nyame mba*" or the children of *Nyame*. This appellation portrays the derived nature of their existence and power.<sup>55</sup>

These lesser deities perform the same functions as the ancestors. The primary difference is that all ancestors are revered, whereas some of these gods are known to be evil and any of them may be held in contempt if they fail to deliver what those who make sacrifices to them desire.<sup>56</sup>

While these lesser deities are associated with rocks, trees, particular places, or rivers, they are not, as early

missionaries believed, to be identified with those objects or places. While these gods may be contacted there, they are not confined to or identical with these objects or places.<sup>57</sup>

That this understanding of these gods is fairly universal leads to a rejection of the term animism for traditional African religion. Focusing on this one aspect of African traditional religion to the exclusion of all others would be comparable, say, to only noticing that Christians often have Bibles on their altars and, therefore, declaring that Christianity was really bookism.

Pobee states that the second aspect (the first being the all-pervasiveness of religion) of the Akan world view is the "*sensus communis*." In discussing this sense of togetherness so important for the African, several authors made reference to the African version of Descarte's *cogito ergo sum*. Whereas Descartes speaks for the Western world when he says, "I think, therefore, I am", the African would say, "*cognatus ergo sum*" ("I belong, therefore I am."). The family to which one belongs is made up of the ancestors, the living, and the yet-to-be-born. It is an extended family and not the nuclear family of modern Western society.<sup>58</sup>

This intimate sense of belonging is communicated by the Akan anthropology. A person is composed of *mogya* (blood) which comes from the mother and represents the earthly or bodily part of a person; the *sunsum* (spirit) which comes from the father and represents the life force within the

body; and the *kra* (soul) which is the undying personality which comes from God. Thus, a child belongs both to the mother's clan (the Akan are matrilineal) and to his or her father's.<sup>59</sup>

Status in society, whether one, for example, is considered a child or an adult, is determined by whether or not one has gone through *rites de passage*. Initiation rites signify one's belonging and are quite essential to African traditional religion. This is a subject to which this study returns later.<sup>60</sup>

The third aspect referred to by Pobee is a sense of finitude. There is a strong sense of being quite vulnerable to spirit-beings and witches. Witches are taken very seriously throughout Africa as agents of evil.<sup>61</sup> This vulnerability is countered by attempts to propitiate the ancestors and gods, by divination to determine the cause of evil occurrences so that propitiation can be made, and by the identification and eradication of witches.<sup>62</sup> The method of propitiation is generally through sacrifice, whether that is something as simple as a libation poured out for the gods or the slaughtering of an ox. This, too, is a subject to which this study must return.<sup>63</sup>

The final aspect of African traditional religion which this study considers because of its use by some African theologians is spirit-possession. King describes this as a universal phenomena among the peoples of Africa. He says that the participant in a possession dance will go limp when

possessed by an ancestor or deity and "then suddenly leap into tremendous activity and take on the characteristics of the spirit." Often this will include speaking on behalf of the god or ancestor.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter looks at the expressed need for Africanization, not only of liturgy, but of theology as well. A warning has been issued about the danger of oversimplifying such a diverse continent. The chapter looked at an overview of the history of Christianity in Africa to see both how Christianity could be seen as naturally indigenous and how the modern missionary movement has given rise to a strong desire for Africanization. Finally, some elements which appear to be common to all of African traditional belief were examined.

A part of the modern African scene is the existence of African independent churches. This phenomenon will now be examined to understand why it has occurred and what potential it has as a source for the Africanization of the historic mission churches of Africa.

## NOTES

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Harold Guite, "Culture and Mission," *Theological Bulletin* 3, no. 6 (May 1975): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nya Kwiawon Taryor, Sr., *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity* (Chicago: Strugglers Community Press, 1984), viii.

<sup>3</sup> Taryor, viii.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 68.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), 9, 231-32.

<sup>6</sup> National Geographic Society, *Atlas of the World*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981), 200-13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 50-51, 200-13, 234-37.

<sup>8</sup> Pobee, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1986), 11. Mazrui credits Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1958) for the idea.

<sup>10</sup> Mazrui, 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> Mazrui, 72-79.

<sup>12</sup> See National Geographic Society, 200; Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, 6th ed. (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 2; and Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver and Fage, 10; and Shillington, 16, and 32.

<sup>14</sup> See Oliver and Fage, 1-2, 20; and Peter Garlake, *The Kingdoms of Africa*, The Making of the Past Series (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1990), 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver and Fage, 21-26.

<sup>16</sup> Mazrui, 32. The two processes are intimately related according to Mazrui: "Islam in Africa is linguistically uncompromising, demanding due conformity with the language in which God communicated with humankind" (p. 141).

<sup>17</sup> Shillington, 81-87.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver and Fage, 90-93, 103. See also Shillington, 174. Shillington notes that some scholars suggest that the number of slaves may have been double this amount due to poor record keeping.

<sup>19</sup> Oliver and Fage, 103, 107-09.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 115-17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 137-38, 140, 157, and 159.

<sup>22</sup> See Oliver and Fage, 160-61; and Shillington, 305.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver and Fage, 172-73, 179.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 200-34. It is debatable, however, if one can yet include South Africa as an independent country even though it is not controlled by a foreign colonial power.

<sup>26</sup> Noel Q. King, *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1986), 75.

<sup>27</sup> See Taryor, 22; King, 75, 77; and Shillington, 68.

<sup>28</sup> See King, 80 regarding the history of the Ethiopian Church; and Taryor, 32 regarding its influence today.

<sup>29</sup> Taryor, 39.

<sup>30</sup> King, 80.

<sup>31</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 300.

<sup>32</sup> See King, 81-82; and Taryor, 126-75.

<sup>33</sup> King, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Taryor, 22.

<sup>35</sup> King, 89-91.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in David Livingstone, *Livingstone's Travels*, ed. James I. MacNair (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 173. To be fair to Livingstone, he understood the development of commerce conducted in a Christian fashion to be the best way of finally putting an end to the slave trade.



38 Josiah U. Young, *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986), 15.

39 Pobee, 57. Further allusion to dress is based on a quote from Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), 69.

40 Young, 19-21.

41 Pobee, 36.

42 King, 2.

43 Pobee, 44.

44 Young, 64.

45 Pobee, 44, 26.

46 Ibid., 45.

47 King, 24.

48 See Pobee, 46; and King, 26.

49 John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 3-41.

50 E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), 135. Idowu, however, admits to the difficulty in the use of this term and qualifies it as "diffused monotheism" because of the belief in derived divinities.

51 See Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1984, 58; and Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religion: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 50.

52 B. A. Ogot, "Concept of Jok," *African Studies* 20 (1961): 123-30. Cited in Mazrui, 50.

53 Mazrui, 52.

54 See Pobee, 46; and King, 26.

55 Pobee, 47.

56 Ibid., 48.

57 Ibid., 47.

58 Ibid., 49.

- 59 Ibid, 49.
- 60 Young, 66.
- 61 Pobee, 51; and King, 70-71.
- 62 Young, 67; and King, 73.
- 63 King, 65.
- 64 Ibid., 60, 63.

## CHAPTER 3

## The African Independent Churches

The African independent churches have combined traditional African world view and practices with Christianity. Nya K. Taryor, Sr. states in the preface of his book, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity*, that, "as a result of the independent churches, Christianity in Africa is reaching the inner heart of the men and women on the grass-roots levels -- people whose life had never been actually touched by mission Christianity. These churches meet the needs of the people."<sup>1</sup>

Taryor states that these African independent churches present a serious challenge to the mission churches and will play an important role in defining the face of African Christianity. He warns that the mission churches must follow the example of these independent churches in making the church both Christian and African if they are to "have a significant future."<sup>2</sup>

Taryor is right about the need for the mission churches to examine the success of the independent church movement. How closely the mission churches must follow the example of the independent churches is another matter yet to be decided.

The challenge of the African independent churches can be taken simply on the level of church growth and a competition as to who will get the largest flock; or it can

be taken as a challenge to the mission churches to re-examine their effectiveness and faithfulness to their mission.

The author of this study repudiates discussion of the topic merely on the level of church growth. While church growth is important, if indigenization is understood merely as a strategy for enlarging membership rolls and competing with the African independent churches, then the discussion can end here with condemnation.

There is a much more serious challenge issued by the independent churches of Africa than a mere statistical one. The African independent churches are challenging the mission churches to be more faithful to the gospel mandate.

It is important to recognize that the African independent churches are, as J. V. Taylor says, "the expression of a demand for the Church to be more African, but it may be more important to recognize in them the demand for the Church to become more Christian."<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that the mission churches are unchristian, but that their faithfulness to the gospel message in their context is hampered by pretending that the context is European or American. This pretense leads to syncretism as African Christians fail to find mission Christianity responding to their needs, and thus seek elsewhere to have their needs met.

Incarnation is the issue here. The Report on Worship accepted by the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Montreal in July 1963, states,

Indigenization of the Christian way of life, in every country to which the gospel comes, is a natural corollary to the doctrine of the Incarnation, according to which God not only became [hu]man, but expressed that [humanity] in terms of the time and place in which he lived.... Indigenization is, therefore, a process by which the life of Christ expresses itself in the members of his Body, in the several regional churches.<sup>4</sup>

The concern, then, is not how to imitate the African independent churches in order to gain more converts to mission churches, but how to faithfully incarnate Christ in African cultures. The African independent churches do not provide absolute models to imitate wholesale, but are a source to which the mission churches can look as they critically decide what God's will for their future is.

It might be helpful to remember that the term mission churches refers to those churches which historically were founded by missionary endeavor. It is assumed that these churches have indigenized leadership already and, thus, are not missionary dependent any longer.

It will be important, therefore, to look at the African independent churches, to discuss causative factors for their emergence and success, and to examine what they have to contribute to the life of the mission churches. A. R. Sprunger, in fact, states that, "There will be no relevant theology in...Africa...as long as the Universal Church and

the Mission Churches do not start looking at, listening to, and learning from our separatist brothers [and sisters]."<sup>5</sup>

#### The Emergence of African Independent Churches

During the twentieth century, African independent churches have emerged in Africa that are both Christian and African. Noel King describes them as, "groups claiming to be Christian that have resulted from African initiatives and have totally eschewed non-African leadership."<sup>6</sup>

Beginning with the last quarter of the nineteenth century, African independent churches began multiplying rapidly. Today, at least 8.75 percent of African Christians belong to African independent churches. More than fourteen million members are spread among about eight thousand denominations.<sup>7</sup> By sheer numbers alone, these churches command attention for they cause one to query the causes for their emergence and popularity.

#### Causative Factors for Their Emergence

Determining the causative factors for the emergence of these churches is a very complex endeavor. While some of the churches, such as the Masowe Vapostori, an indigenous church in Zimbabwe, arose as a reaction to colonial control and the European mission churches, others have not. As Bennetta Jules-Rosette points out, "The contemporary religious movements can no longer be regarded as colonial reaction formations."<sup>8</sup>

The causes are almost as varied as the forms of African independent churches. Those given as the primary ones vary according to the analyst.

Noel King, for example, considers the amount of restraint on the natural spiritual exuberance of Africans by the mission churches to be the most important factor.<sup>9</sup>

E. W. Fasholé-Luke makes a similar point when he credits the mission churches' failure to indigenize polity, liturgy, ministry, hymnody, and church architecture.<sup>10</sup>

G. C. Oosthuizen begins to broaden the perspective:

Rapid social change threw many back to the traditional world view, where age old securities were revalued in the light of empirical Christianity. Meaningful aspects of these securities are preserved and this explains much of the strength of Afro-Christian religions. They are reactions against over-institutionalized and over-intellectualized churches; they serve as shock absorbers, as intimate, face-to-face communities reminiscent of the traditional clans.<sup>11</sup>

That traditional religions have also undergone transformation in the face of massive social upheaval suggests that Oosthuizen's emphasis on social change as a causative factor is justified.<sup>12</sup>

Jules-Rosette identifies the migration to urban life as the primary source of this social change.<sup>13</sup> As a result of this view, Jules-Rosette states that these independent churches provide practical solutions to the many difficulties engendered by urban life, as well as for illness and other universal problems. These churches, she says, have developed a social structure that "parallels

the functions of traditional life without recreating it."<sup>14</sup> If Jules-Rosette is correct, then, as servants, the mission churches must be willing to be Africanized so as to meet the needs of a people whose traditional cultures have been uprooted and over-turned.

The reactions of the African independent churches to the mission churches are educative to the mission churches. Harold Turner describes some of the reactive causal factors for the emergence of these independent Afro-Christian churches. Among them, he lists economic, political, social, and religious factors. Primary among the religious factors, Turner lists a "deep yearning" to be independent of western mediation in order to have a more direct relationship to God.<sup>15</sup>

Symptomatic of this deep motive, according to Turner, is the disappointment Africans feel towards the missionary approach to Christianity. The Western approach has failed to grasp that Christians are blessed to be a blessing -- i.e., empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal, to combat evil, to offer divine guidance, and to live in communality with each other and with the ancestors. As we look at some of these Afro-Christian independent churches, we will see this more clearly.<sup>16</sup>

Victor Hayward echoes the words of Turner when he criticizes the Western missionary churches for failing to reach beyond the individual's "intellectual and emotional levels." He accuses them of failing to reach to the



"deeper emotional levels through myth and ritual, rhythm and music." He credits this failure as being responsible for the rise of indigenous churches.<sup>17</sup>

Robert Mitchell further amplifies this by identifying the most significant factor for the emergence of the independent church movement in Africa as "the general failure of missionaries to recognize the objective reality of the powers of evil which, in African society, manifest themselves in such things as witchcraft."<sup>18</sup>

Bishop Bengt Sundkler adds another factor to our discussion: Protestant denominational divisions. Taryor explains that the fact that Protestants were already divided made it easier for Africans to consider dividing further.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever the primary causative factors are for the emergence of independent African Christian churches, each of these factors come into play when the context of the challenge of these churches to the mission churches is considered. Each serves as a critique of the mission churches which needs to be addressed and is, therefore, important to this dialogue.

#### A Survey of African Independent Churches

Obviously, this study can only look briefly at a tiny sample of the thousands of these churches. Even a brief look, however, will provide some examples of Africanization that may serve as resources for the mission churches.

### The Kimbanguists

The Kimbanguist Church is first in this study as it is the largest of these churches and the one which is internationally recognized as a member of the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches.<sup>20</sup>

The Kimbanguist Church has three million members. It calls itself "*L'Eglise de Jesus-Christ sur de la Terre*," translated as "The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth."<sup>21</sup>

This church was begun by Simon Kimbangu (A.D. 1889 - 1951) in the Belgian Congo (Zaire) in the 1920s. Its origin was as a movement offering healing, although right from the beginning it had a messianic slant.<sup>22</sup>

Kimbangu taught "of a truly African Savior who demanded self-determination, the end of oppression, the sharing of resources, and the bringing of practical love to the needy."<sup>23</sup> Kimbangu was offering an alternative to the mission churches which he saw as acquiescent to, if not responsible for, this oppression by the Belgians.

This was considered dangerous by the Belgian officials, so Kimbangu was arrested and sentenced to scourging and execution. Jules-Rosette notes that it was not until this occurred that Kimbangu's "messianic message [which] included hopes of political and social freedom" crystallized. Thereafter, Kimbanguism was enabled to play an active role in the independence movement in Zaire.<sup>24</sup>

### The Harrist Movement

Paul Breidenbach quotes a prophetess as saying, "When the man Harris came he changed the whole world. He changed all of the people."<sup>25</sup>

"The man Harris" is William Wade Harris. He was born in about 1865 in southeast Liberia near the border with the Ivory Coast. He became a Christian under the influence of a Methodist minister. Later, he was implicated in an alleged coup attempt and, for this, was arrested and imprisoned. While in prison, he had a vision in which the Angel Gabriel told him God had selected him to be his last prophet. Upon release from prison, he undertook this ministry. Finding little receptiveness to his message in Liberia, he went with his two wives to the Ivory Coast and then to the British Gold Coast (Ghana). In a matter of months, about 120 thousand people had been baptized by him. This multiplied the number of Christians in the Ivory Coast by a hundred.<sup>26</sup>

He "performed a simple ritual baptism which the people later called the 'sign of the prophet.'" He would bless the water and pour it on his converts' foreheads and make the sign of the cross with his thumb on their foreheads in the water. He would often hit them with a Bible or place it on their heads. His wives would sing and ring the calabashes to drive out evil spirits. Often, glossolalia, seizures, and possessions would accompany these baptisms.<sup>27</sup>

Harris did not set up any institution to deal with his converts, but did tell them to go to the mission churches

and did identify former adepts (practitioners and healers of traditional religion) to carry on his work. These were called "the Apostles." Two of these, in particular, Grace Tani and Kwesi ("John") Nackabah, both healers, became the two elders who founded the Twelve Apostles Church of Ghana.<sup>28</sup>

The Harrist movement has a dual focus centered on these two elders. Grace Tani is seen as the mother of the church. Her work (and that of her successors) is healing. Each Friday afternoon, healing services are held with the goal of spirit possession. Water is the dominant symbol of healing to the complete exclusion of herbs or any other traditional healing methods.<sup>29</sup>

Nackabah, on the other hand, represents the literate preachers. Chapel services occur on Sundays. Where the women are the primary actors in the healing services, the men are the leaders in these preaching services. The services begin very structured, but break down into dancing.<sup>30</sup>

The Harrists draw on traditional understandings of healing, possession, spirits, and kinship. It is only one of the church movements which largely focuses on healing and the woman's role in healing.

#### The Masowe Vapostori of Zimbabwe

This church, founded by John Masowe, is a syncretistic church combining elements of Shona culture and European culture. The church strongly rejects European domination to

the point of becoming communal artisans who need not work for any European.<sup>31</sup>

Masowe was born in 1915 as Shoniwa. He, like Harris, came under the influence of Methodist missionaries. After dying and reviving, he emerged as Johane (the Baptist) Masowe. He called his followers to refuse to work for Europeans, to refuse passes required by the Rhodesian government, to forsake witchcraft and other traditional practices, to worship out of doors (Masowe means "open place"), and not to plant crops.<sup>32</sup>

According to Kileff and Kileff, Masowe became a black Messiah, a rival to Jesus Christ, for his followers. Harold Turner notes that the following of an African founder as an alternate Christ is rare among the independent Afro-Christian churches.<sup>33</sup>

If Masowe did indeed become a rival to Christ, this church would have crossed outside of the pale of Christianity. There is an alternative way of understanding Masowe's role, however.

Africans understand the life-force or spirit as something people share in to different degrees. A spiritual adept may share the spirit of an ancestor or divinity to such a degree as to be identified with it. If Masowe was understood as possessing the spirit of Christ to an extremely high degree, he would be identified with Christ even while remaining an intermediary. It would, therefore, be inaccurate to state that Masowe was seen as a substitute

for Christ. The difficulty which remains is that, in practice, it is difficult to distinguish between understanding Masowe as sharing Christ's spirit and understanding him to be Christ.

Like many of these independent churches, the Masowe Vapostori allow and even promote polygyny as a means of evangelism. They have strict rules of conduct and a particular mode of dress.<sup>34</sup>

There are mixed approaches to the issue of polygny/monogamy among the African independent churches. In most, however, it is tolerated. In fact, as G. C. Oosthuizen states, "Monogamy is frequently regarded not as a Christian institution so much as a specifically European one, lacking scriptural sanction."<sup>35</sup> The Protestant principle of being silent where Scripture is silent would lead to the toleration of polygyny.

The leadership of the Masowe Vapostori church centers around six charisms: evangelists, preachers, Holy Spirit-mediums, prophets, judges, and singers.<sup>36</sup>

Since the death of Masowe, intense schism has resulted due to the lack of a clear successor and since only Masowe had baptized anyone.<sup>37</sup>

#### The Jamaa Movement

Members of this movement in southern Zaire come from many different groups. Jamaa was begun by the Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels. That this church was begun by a foreigner raises the question as to whether it is truly

independent or indigenous. That this church was not endorsed by the Roman Catholic church and that it employs traditional African philosophy still qualifies it to be considered as an independent church.

Tempels made the male-female relationship dominant in his teachings. His extension of this to the Trinity and to the roles of Jesus and Mary set him at odds with orthodox Roman Catholic teaching.<sup>38</sup>

Tempels' teaching used mythological elements from both traditional African thought and the Bible to reflect on the ideal male-female relationships. This ideal is based on unity, not equality. The stress on fecundity (the ideal result of such unity) allowed polygyny.<sup>39</sup>

#### Selective Indigenization

What these independent Afro-Christian churches make very clear is that indigenization or Africanization does not mean wholesale acceptance of traditional African culture. Harold Guite, eager to see such Africanization take place, tells of how horrified Nigerian Methodists were when they were it was suggested that they dance in worship. He says that third-generation African Christians have to be convinced by missionaries to be more African in their worship.<sup>40</sup>

Now, while Guite may very well be right to blame this on a continued cultural domination from Europe, as an outsider, he may very well be missing something important

about this rejection. L. W. Brown describes what Guite may be failing to understand:

There can easily be attempts at surface indigenization which are misleading and dangerous. A [person] from outside a culture may think he [or she] recognizes certain symbols or art forms in it as akin to his [or her] own Christian concepts or experience, and press on the indigenous Christian community the use of these familiar symbols. Often they will reject them, as, for example, most African Christians reject music and dances with a pagan origin. They know better than the outsider the emotional and mythic context of these symbols and they refuse to confuse the old and the new.<sup>41</sup>

Harry Sawyerr makes a similar point when he warns of the danger of adopting "African indigenous ideas and practices merely because they fascinate foreign theologians."<sup>42</sup>

Worship is not intended to be a living museum of culture designed for the tourist who is looking to say, "How quaint?!"

The Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, held September 12-21, 1972 (at which Sawyerr made the above point) amplified this by stating in its findings that there is a further danger of "artificially reviving and perpetuating traditions, concepts and practices which are dying a natural death, thereby not being sufficiently orientated to the present and future."<sup>43</sup>

Certainly, we can see among the independent Afro-Christian churches the rejection of some traditional (a better word than Brown's "pagan") religious practices. The practices being rejected are deemed incompatible with the needs of African community in this day and age.



That process, however, is not always one of acceptance/rejection. Often it is a matter of transformation. The Africans rightly point to some Euro-American customs as pagan, and yet those artifacts and rituals have been Christianized for Euro-Americans (e.g., the Christmas tree or the wedding ring). A similar process occurs in the African indigenous movements.

Jules-Rosette, relying heavily on Victor Turner's works, speaks of belief systems altering as a result of external influences, and shows how the same concrete symbol can take on entirely new meanings. She further goes on to state that, even in the process of rejecting certain symbols and practices, often traditional elements are used. Thus, she says, "aspects of tradition are retained through their very rejection."<sup>44</sup>

Most of these churches have had a strong focus on healing which was much neglected by Western churches. The independent churches did not say (as did the mission churches), "Throw away all your traditional healing tools and practices and use only Western-style medicine based on an entirely different anthropology and cosmology."

Instead, the African independent churches understand health as holistic, involving body, mind, and spirit. Rather than the mechanistic approach of Western medicine, traditional African religion sees sickness as spiritual. It is the result of the attack of evil spirits, often made

possible as a result of sin. There are no naturally caused illnesses for the traditional African.<sup>45</sup>

Grace Tani, one of the founding elders of the Harrist movement, may have thrown away her *edur* (healing herbs) upon conversion by Harris, but she did not reject her traditional world view at the same time. Her approach to healing still had to take seriously this spiritual component. The claim of Christians has to be one of greater efficacy because of the greater power of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Masowe Vapostori provide a good example of this approach. According to Clive and Margaret Kileff, traditional Shona customs of sacrifice have been superceded by prayer. Prayer, they believe, offers them the same protection against the *ngozi* (avenging spirits) or *mashavi* (evil spirits) as did traditional practices. The Holy Spirit fills them rather than these other spirits.<sup>46</sup>

The independent churches have attempted to correct a failing of the mission churches: the failure to come "to grips with traditional practices and with the world view that these beliefs and practices imply." Until this failure is overcome, K. A. Busia warns that mission Christianity cannot overcome its artificiality and superficiality.<sup>47</sup>

John Pobee, while agreeing with Busia, adds another warning: "While we affirm what is good in African culture, we also wish to warn against accepting everything African en masse and as useful in the process of adaptation. Some elements may have to be modified or even rejected."<sup>48</sup>

The difficult task of the mission churches is to attempt to do this selective indigenization with people who, long ago, left behind much of what is African about them behind on Sunday mornings. The task, however, is necessary in order to more faithfully present the Christian faith in the African context and to reach out to those who have rejected Christianity because of its colonial garb.

Only a process of action and reflection by the African mission churches themselves, in dialogue with the Scriptures and historic Christianity, will enable the mission churches to find their way. Dialogue with the African independent churches will also be important in this process.

Unfortunately, many of the American and European missionaries rejected these indigenous movements out of hand. William Wade Harris, for example, was directing his converts to the new Methodist and Roman Catholic missions in the Ivory Coast and British Gold Coast (Ghana). Paul Breidenbach points out, however, that the missionaries rejected Harris' converts largely because their expressions of faith were not in line with European standards. Western missionaries took the highly emotional worship for a new form of fetish worship.<sup>49</sup>

In a different context, United Methodist Bishop Roy Sano explains this tendency:

When our faith is expressed in familiar cultural modes which are well accepted by us, we speak of it as an *incarnation* of the faith. When the cultural modes are unfamiliar, we are likely to speak of this embodiment of the faith as *syncretism*.<sup>50</sup>

The issue as to how syncretistic one can be without genuinely moving beyond the pale of Christianity has particularly come into the fore as some of these independent Afro-Christian churches have sought membership in ecumenical councils of churches.

Victor Hayward has responded to this issue by stating that while he recognizes that the rise of these independent churches are, at least in part, a result of the failure of the mission churches and that, therefore, he shares a sympathy with them, that this does not mean blind acceptance of each of these churches. Instead, he calls for a discerning of the spirits. "We cannot exempt any preaching of the Gospel, or any organization or teaching of any church body from what we recognize as universal truths about the givenness of the Gospel and of the church."<sup>51</sup>

The obvious problem is determining the content of this "givenness." Recent theological developments among American black and feminist theologians, Latin American liberation theologians, Korean *minjung* theologians, African theologians, and a host of other local theologians is that what is given is very much contextually determined. The imagined universality of European white male theologians was only the result of blind prejudice. Their making of their own particular experience as normative for all people only proved that their theology was not universal. This issue will need to be delved into quite a bit more by the mission churches.

Both the independent churches and the mission churches of Africa recognize the need to move further in developing African theologies. Taryor says that the greatest need for both the mission churches and the independent churches of Africa is theological education of a type which will "encourage indigenous theological thinking, reflection, and expression."<sup>52</sup>

Recognizing that most of the Christian church's historical formulations of faith originated as a result of conflicts between varying understandings of doctrine, Harold Turner says that the African independent churches will play an important role in the development of a truly Africanized theology. He discusses the existence of heresy in the independent churches of Africa. The peculiarly African characteristic of some of those heresies will, according to Turner, contribute to the development of African theology as the church dialogues with the heresies raised by the African context and the heresies of these churches.<sup>53</sup>

To the above, fortunately, Turner adds another point which must be included; that is that the African independent churches reveal that the Western church is culturally-bound in its theology. Might we dare name the assumption that such culturally-bound doctrines are universal heresy as well?<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The independent Afro-Christian churches offer not only a challenge to the mission churches not only in terms of

numerical competition, but in theological faithfulness as well. Selectively drawn from, they offer a rich resource to the mission churches for the process of Africanizing Christianity. They serve as a corrective to many of the practices of the mission churches.

As noted, that process of selection is one which must be done by African Christians in dialogue with historic Christianity and the Scriptures. It will not be easy, but in that direction lies the future into which God is calling the mission churches of Africa.

The independent churches of Africa could, in particular, make important contributions toward a relevant theology, polity, and liturgy among the mission churches of Africa. The Lutheran Theological College's consultation referred to above found:

It is apparent that something can be learnt from ...[these independent churches] with regard to the quality of their fellowship and community life, their meaningful symbolism and liturgy, and their healing and diaconal ministries.<sup>55</sup>

The African independent churches are not, however, perfect. Some have moved outside of the scope of Christianity. Others are essentially faithful, but the "vote" is not yet in about some of their practices. The sorting out of these issues by the African mission churches offers much hope for the development of truly African theologies, liturgies, and polities.

## NOTES

## Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup> Taryor, ix.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., xi.
- <sup>3</sup> John V. Taylor, "Saints or Heretics," in *Basileia: Tribute to Walter Freytag*, 2nd ed., eds. Jan Hermelink and Hans Jochen Margull (Stuttgart: Evang. Missionsverlag, 1961), 312.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in Leslie W. Brown, *Relevant Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, 7.
- <sup>5</sup> A. R. Sprunger, "Contribution of the African Independent Churches to a Relevant Theology of Africa," in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Becken (Durban, Natal: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973), 163.
- <sup>6</sup> King, 109.
- <sup>7</sup> G. C. Oosthuizen, *Afro-Christian Religions* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1979), 2. Different statistics are quoted by other authors. For example, see David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968) who obviously sets the figure at 6,000 denominations. Rene Laurentin, "A Statistical Survey of Christians in Africa," in *The Churches of Africa: Future Prospects*, eds. Claude Geffré and Bertrand Luneau (New York: Seabury, 1977), 95, cites 15 million members in independent churches. James W. Fernandez, in the foreword to *The New Religions of Africa*, ed. Bennetta Jules-Rosette (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing, 1979), xvii gives the figures of 10 million members in 10,000 denominations.
- <sup>8</sup> Bennetta Jules-Rosette, preface to *The New Religions of Africa*, ed. Bennetta Jules-Rosette (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing, 1979), xxi. See also Clive Kileff and Margaret Kileff, "The Masowe Vapostori of Seki," in Jules-Rosette, 151.
- <sup>9</sup> King, 110.
- <sup>10</sup> Edward Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theologies," in *Mission Trends No. 3*, eds. Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1976), 136.
- <sup>11</sup> Oosthuizen, *Afro-Christian Religions*, 2.
- <sup>12</sup> See Jules-Rosette, *The New Religions of Africa*, chaps. 1-4.

- 13 Benetta Jules-Rosette, "Symbols of Power and Change," in *The New Religions of Africa*, 12.
- 14 Benetta Jules-Rosette, "The Arcadian Wish," in *The New Religions of Africa*, 222.
- 15 Harold W. Turner, "Independent Churches of African Origin and Form," in Geffré and Luneau, 106.
- 16 Ibid., 107.
- 17 Victor Hayward, introduction to *African Independent Church Movements*, ed. Victor Hayward (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1963), 9.
- 18 Robert G. Mitchell, "Christian Healing," in Hayward, 50.
- 19 Bengt Sundkler, "What Is at Stake? (2)," in Hayward, 30. See also Taryor, 177.
- 20 Taryor, 226.
- 21 Ibid., 227.
- 22 Jules-Rosette, "Symbols of Power and Change," 15.
- 23 King, 109.
- 24 Jules-Rosette, "Symbols of Power and Change," 15.
- 25 Paul Breidenbach, "The Woman on the Beach and the Man in the Bush," in Jules-Rosette, 99.
- 26 Sheila S. Walker, "Women in the Harrist Movement," in Jules-Rosette, 87-88.
- 27 Breidenbach, 100.
- 28 Ibid., 99-103.
- 29 Ibid., 104-09.
- 30 Ibid., 110.
- 31 Kileff and Kileff, 151.
- 32 Ibid., 152-53.
- 33 Ibid., 153; and Turner, "Independent Churches of African Origin and Form," 106.
- 34 Kileff and Kileff, 159-61.



- 35 G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 181.
- 36 Kileff and Kileff, 163-64.
- 37 Ibid., 167.
- 38 Johannes Fabian, "Man and Woman in the Teachings of the Jamaa Movement," in Jules-Rosette, 172.
- 39 Ibid., 177.
- 40 Guite, 10.
- 41 Brown, 8.
- 42 Harry Sawyerr, "What Is African Theology?," *Africa Theological Journal* 4 (1971): 21.
- 43 Hans-Jürgen Becken, ed., "Findings," in *Relevant Theology for Africa: Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal; September 12-21, 1972*. (Durban, Natal, Union of South Africa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973), 191.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Jules-Rosette, "Symbols of Power and Change," 8-9.
- 46 Bennetta Jules-Rosette, "Women as Ceremonial Leaders in an African Church: The Apostles of John Maranke," in *The New Religions of Africa*, 136-37.
- 47 Kileff and Kileff, 166.
- 48 K. A. Busia, *Christianity and Culture* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 1955), iii. Quoted in Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa*, 5.
- 49 Pobee, 9.
- 50 Breidenbach, 104.
- 51 Roy I. Sano, "Response to Dr. Chung Hyun-Kyung's Presentation to the 7th WCC Assembly, Canberra, Australia, March 1991," unpublished paper, p. 4.
- 52 Victor Hayward, "What Is at Stake? (1)," in *African Independent Church Movements*, 28-29.
- 53 Taryor, 238.
- 54 Turner, "Independent Churches of African Origin and Form," 109.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>56</sup> Becken, "Findings," in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, 190.

## CHAPTER 4

### Seeking Integrity: Liturgical Theology

This chapter seeks to establish the premise which serves as the foundation of this study and to theologically examine the purpose and nature of worship. It especially considers the relationship between liturgy and theology and between liturgy and mission. In addition, it considers the issues related to discovering authentic African forms of Christian worship.

#### The Approach of Liturgical Theology

Fundamental to this study is the assumption that there should be an integrity between the worship practices and the theology of a church. If contextual theologies are to be taken seriously, then the effect their adoption would have on liturgy must be examined. Vice versa, if the church is to practice worship in a certain way, then it must also see how those practices inform theology.

That is not to imply that worship is primarily pedagogical, for it is not. It is only to say that, as it has a pedagogical effect, caution must be taken as to what that effect is.

Our primary tool for examining this relationship is liturgical theology. This is to be distinguished from liturgics.

Liturgics is "the study of liturgies, or the forms of worship."<sup>1</sup> In other words, liturgics is essentially the study of what is or has been done in worship and how.

Liturgical theology, on the other hand, is the study of why persons worship as they do and its effects on the theology they actually live.<sup>2</sup>

Liturgical theology is based on the notion that "actions speak louder than words." What persons do says a lot more about the theology they actually believe than what they profess with their lips. By looking at what a community of faith does together in worship, the examiner is looking at their theology lived out. He or she is looking at the theology they are rehearsing. Worship, therefore, not only communicates theology; it informs it.

Worshippers must be very wary, then, of doing things in their worship which undermine their theology as those corporate actions will have much more power than any words one might use to the contrary. Liturgy and theology must be integrally joined to one another.

#### The Relationship Between Liturgy and Theology

Liturgical scholars and theologians alike have argued about the exact nature of this relationship. The issue is which is primary: theology or liturgy?

G. C. Oosthuizen represents the position that theology is primary and informs our worship:

The relation between theology and liturgy is of vital importance because liturgy is not autonomous, but must be based on sound theological presuppositions. The theology on which worship has to be based therefore needs a thorough study before the formation of liturgy can be sound and effective.<sup>3</sup>

One may also begin with liturgical practices and, from them, determine what the theology being communicated is. This is the position represented in the patristic expression, "*legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*," which means, "the rule of prayer should establish the rule of belief." According to Frank Senn, this statement means that "liturgy informs dogma; practice influences profession."<sup>4</sup>

This approach seems the more correct. One does not theologically determine some points of doctrine one would like to communicate about the presence of the Risen Christ, community, the sacrifice of Christians in union with Christ's sacrifice of himself upon the cross, the Heavenly Banquet, etc. and then invent Holy Communion to do all of this. It is exactly the opposite. Christians practice Holy Communion because eating and drinking with Christ was part of the apostolic experience. It is the practice of Holy Communion which leads to theological reflection on our experience at the table.

Paul Hoon makes a similar point when he recalls that:

Forms of worship were not devised by drawing liturgical inferences from theological statements; rather, theology only codified...the meanings of liturgical experience and stated conceptually what the Church in ... worship had found to be the truth existentially.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, this reflection may lead to new ways of celebrating Holy Communion should one see an unintended and unfortunate theological consequence to his or her present practice. Liturgy and theology must be held together, for "only together can worship and theology be the place of

interpretation, where our world can find and work out the truth as it is appropriately learned and lived today."<sup>6</sup>

While viewing liturgy and theology as mutually necessary for one another, this study maintains that liturgy is still primary for it reaches beyond the cognitive and "lays hold of a person totally."<sup>7</sup> That the Western mission movement brought with it a tendency to see theology as determinative for liturgical practice has led to a highly didactic style of worship with little room for the Holy. S. E. Serote critiques the liturgy of the mission churches precisely because they do not inculcate a sense of awe in the way that some of the traditional practices did.<sup>8</sup>

Liturgical theology represents this latter choice of beginning with the practice of worship. Since the choice of which direction to begin from has very real consequences for the shape of liturgy, it makes the starting point of the liturgy itself a critical choice, and not just an arbitrary one.

This is not to suggest that liturgical forms magically appeared and were not formulated by human beings. It is only to suggest that the attempt to begin with a theoretical base and then apply that theory or theology to liturgy leads to very different consequences than beginning from the other direction. Beginning with liturgical practices and reflecting upon them theologically in order to transform those liturgical practices and reflect upon them again is far more fruitful to this study. It is this praxis approach

which will enable the African mission churches to Africanize liturgy.

Essentially what liturgical theology attempts to do is to "translate what is expressed by the language of worship... into the language of theology" in order to reflect upon them.<sup>9</sup> Having made this translation step, the church can then ask whether the theology it is teaching adequately communicates its liturgical experiences. The church may also ask whether its worship practices are communicating the theology it wants them to communicate.

Christians are, thus, no longer confined to the "Well, it has always been done that way" approach or to pursuing the latest fad. Such an approach will help to protect the church from the vagaries of being so contextual and relevant in its worship as to lose all sight of tradition or of being so tradition bound as to be totally irrelevant. This will play quite a vital function in determining what is appropriate for an Africanized liturgy.<sup>10</sup>

In this study, the assumption is made that, if the language of worship can be translated into the language of theology, then the language of theology can be translated into the language of worship. In other words, it should be possible to determine what changes need to be made in worship practices if a new African theology is adopted. This move is possible because of the premise that the two ought to be integrally related. It is this integrity of

worship and theology that is necessary in the African contexts.

The desired integrity must, however, also include the context itself. The African context must inform both the theology and the worship practices adopted. The integrity desired is, therefore, between context, theology, and worship practices.

### The Purpose of Worship

What is the purpose to worship? Another way of asking this question is simply, "What is worship?" In particular, what is Christian worship?

James Empereur, a Roman Catholic liturgical theologian, warns:

Liturgy is a mystery and cannot be defined according to visible concepts alone. A definition of the liturgy which would proceed from clear and univocal concepts is impossible.... It is a mystery of faith and can only be dealt with in terms of symbols, models, and paradigms.<sup>11</sup>

That symbols can be useful allows Empereur's definition of a liturgical symbol to be used as a description of worship itself. Worship would, then, be defined as:

A sensible reality, which renders present to and involves a person subjectively in a transforming experience of the mystery of transcendence by means of a community.<sup>12</sup>

While this will prove to be a helpful definition, further on, a simpler definition (which is quite similar) is provided by J. D. Crichton. He defines Christian worship as the communal response, brought forth from Christians by the



Holy Spirit, to what God has done for all people in Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

It is, therefore, properly experienced as a supernatural event in which God reveals God's self and, secondly, as a human action in which the worshipper draws near to God. It is not the worshipper's "needs and wishes, but God's presence and incitement [which] first evoke it [worship]."<sup>14</sup>

Evelyn Underhill warns that worship loses its flavor when "it is emptied of this unearthly element, this awestruck and creaturely sense of the Holy and Immortal," the sheer adoration of God. Underhill might also criticize the mission churches for becoming too self-centered.

The tendency of all worship to decline from adoration to demand, and from the supernatural to the ethical, shows how strong a pull is needed to neutralize the anthropocentric trend of the human mind.<sup>15</sup>

Worship, therefore, is not primarily didactic or pedagogical. It is neither an ethics lesson nor a bible study. Worship is the extravagant action of communally pouring out love to the One who first loved the worshipper.

Although worship is not essentially a utilitarian act, it does have utilitarian effects. This chapter has already referred to its pedagogical or didactic effects. Empeurer's definition of liturgical symbols which was used here as a definition of worship included the statement that worship is a "transforming experience."<sup>16</sup>

Underhill refers to this experience as well. She says that "worship purifies, enlightens, and at last transforms, every life submitted to its influence: and this not merely in the ethical or devotional sense." Underhill is saying that worship has the effect of making the worshipper holy "for Christian worship is in itself a purifying force."<sup>17</sup> This holiness goes beyond being made good to include the process of becoming more human and humane. If holiness is understood in that fashion, then Empereur is making the same point.

Empereur states that worship moves those who claim faith in Christ to recognize their own need for redemption. He defines redemption as "becoming a better human being" or as being made holy.<sup>18</sup>

The Africanizing of worship is the issue of helping people become more fully human; more holy. That concern is an evangelical concern. As Empereur declares, it is a matter of redemption.

Unfortunately, if one mentions the word, "evangelical," many people only think quantitatively. That side of evangelism is an issue related to Africanization, but it is not the only evangelical issue.

Jean-Marc Éla comments on the quantitative implications of failing to Africanize liturgy, stating that many Africans will no longer agree to living "their faith by means of a borrowed humanity." This, he says, is the reason why the

church needs "to rediscover, within the bosom of Christianity, the African face of [the hu]man."<sup>19</sup>

If the mission churches are to reach out to the people in whose midst they are, they will need to do so in forms appropriate and acceptable to those to be reached. The larger evangelistic issue, however, is whether the mission churches can indeed proclaim good news (remembering that "*evangelion*" means good news) if they are not expressive of the indigenous culture in which the church finds itself.

Kwesi Dickson addresses this issue in terms of the "fullness of a people's humanity." He says that this "full humanity would come from not only the winning of socio-economic and political freedom, but also --- and more importantly --- the winning of the cultural battle, for it is the latter which defines more fundamentally the humanity of a people."<sup>20</sup>

Liturgy is an important arena for this "cultural battle." That liturgy ought to encourage "full humanity" is an extremely important point to consider in this discussion. Frank Senn explains this concern well:

Liturgy is obviously a human act performed by a human community for the glorification of God and the edification of its members. As a human act, liturgy ought to be *humane*; that is to say, people should be able *to be themselves* in worship. This means that the forms and styles of celebration should be expressive of the indigenous culture.<sup>21</sup>

What is at issue here, then, is a matter of missiology.

Geoffrey Wainwright declares, "The Church's mission in the world is not only evangelistic but also liturgical."<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, Paul Hoon declares that "authentic worship... is one of the most powerful forms of mission and evangelism the Church can employ."<sup>23</sup> For this to be true, the reverse needs also to be true. That is, worship must be enabled to incorporate missionary aspects. Hoon goes farther to posit that "worship can exist only to the extent that it is missionary."<sup>24</sup>

The question remains as to what is meant by missionary. In this study, the term is used to refer to far more than the geographical spread of Christianity. The term missionary obviously implies participation in mission. What then is the mission of the church in which its liturgy will share? Those whose answer differs from what follows will derive very different results from this pursuit.

The church was born in the moment when the Crucified, Risen, and Ascending Christ gave it a mission: "And you will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The church was and is invited to share Jesus Christ's vision of the Reign of God and to proclaim that Reign by witnessing to it in its corporate life and in the lives of its members even while yet in the midst of an unredeemed world. "Clothed with power from on high," the Holy Spirit, the church is empowered to accept that invitation to mission.<sup>25</sup>

The church exists, therefore, not for itself, but for mission. Its mission is to participate in God's mission by being an anticipatory sign of the Reign of God. This,

inevitably, leads to an engagement with the powers of darkness in our world.

One can only truly see how dark this world is in contrast to the coming light of God's Reign. As one glimpses that vision, one is able to see more clearly how far this world is from God's will. One is able to more clearly hear the cries, to feel the hurts, and to taste the salt of the tears of sisters and brothers. At the same time as one is opened to the suffering around and within him or her, he or she is also given hope of a different future.

This hope drives the church into action as partners in God's movement to establish the Reign. Human beings will not establish the Reign on their own, but neither will God. God invites human involvement and, through the Holy Spirit gives *charisms* to make that participation possible. Even as God works through human beings, it is God who will ultimately establish justice and righteousness and set right all that is wrong with this world. That, in the end, it is God who does so offers one the strength to keep on hoping even when there is no reason to hope. That God does not do so without the assistance of humanity prevents quietism. The Christian cannot passively wait for the *parousia*. Her or his waiting must be active preparation by participating in God's movement in time.

That participation begins first in proclamation. "The Church," Wainwright reminds, "has the missionary task of proclaiming God's gospel to the world."<sup>26</sup>

Primary to that proclamation, however, is sharing the vision of the Reign of God. That sharing is as much with each other within the church as it is with the world outside of the church. That is why worship is so important for the mission and life of the church.

This proclamation comes first to those within the church who then share the good news of salvation with others. The proclamation of salvation includes the proclamation of justice for there is no real salvation that does not promote "human dignity and the unity of all peoples."<sup>27</sup>

Liturgy, therefore, must anticipate the future Reign of God. It must be a witness to the world of an alternative future and must itself embody justice and inclusiveness. Without such integrity between a theology of liberation and liturgy, the mission of the church cannot succeed. With such integrity, it can make great strides.

For a people to fully participate in the mission of the church, the church cannot ask them to pretend to be someone else than who they are. S. E. Serote connects this with the passage from the Acts of the Apostles wherein Paul is in Athens at the altar of the unknown God and declares "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." He says,

The cultural heritage of Africa, the community structure, the religiosity and the spiritual experience of Africa, past and present is a reality ...that cannot be disregarded....because it is into this that the "him declare I unto you" of St. Paul comes. Africa cannot afford to empty

itself of its personality. Instead its personality has to be permeated, flavoured and re-directed Gospel-wise.<sup>28</sup>

To try to empty African liturgy from its African personality is, ultimately, unsuccessful. When the official liturgies ignore the culture of a people, popular unofficial worship practices arise.

P. Abega spoke of this tendency. He states that the missionary's disregard for African traditional religion, to the point of seeing it as demonic, meant:

Every time that the African reverts to curative or divinatory practices, etc., he [or she] does what is fundamentally evil in the eyes of ... Christianity he [or she] has been taught. But nevertheless his [or her] whole being continues to be influenced subconsciously by traditional rituals.<sup>29</sup>

In times of crisis, African Christians turn to traditional ways. The difference is that now they will bear some guilt about doing so. E. E. Uzukwu addressed this, explaining that, in the clash between the symbolic world of the traditional culture and that of missionary practice, people will work out a way of having "parallel ways of action" and of "living in parallel communities" (traditional and missionary Christian).<sup>30</sup>

There is a symbolic universe still in existence for the African which can be drawn upon by those seeking to do appropriate African theology and liturgy. The continued existence of this symbolic world means that, eventually, the process of indigenization or Africanization must inevitably occur. That this has been the history of the Christian

church in every time and place also makes this process inevitable.

### The Indigenization of Liturgy

From the very beginnings of the Christian church, there was always an interplay between liturgy and culture. To every new place to which Christianity came was brought cultural forms of worship foreign to its new location. In time, the people of this new locale always found ways of expressing themselves culturally through worship. Worship, therefore, was indigenized. This, therefore, is not something new to modern missions, but something basic about the nature of worship itself. If liturgy did not go through this transformation process, it would not speak to the new culture and would, therefore, not take root. It would quickly die out as something irrelevant and foreign. This is what African theologians and church leaders are trying to avoid. They are trying to overcome the early attempts of the missionaries to stunt this process.<sup>31</sup>

Abega says that the aim is to integrate carefully selected elements of traditional African worship with Christianity. In doing so, the churches would be enabled to "recreate the unity of the [baptized person], who must be wholly Christian and wholly at home in his [or her] society."<sup>32</sup> In order to achieve this aim, the mission churches will have to sort carefully between what forms are essential for Christian liturgy and what are not.



As previously noted, the Africanization of worship will mean discovering forms of worship authentic to African cultural and socio-political realities and to Christian tradition. While this study distinguishes this from mere adaptation of the liturgy, Empereur's comments on the adaptation of worship are important here:

Adaptation seeks only to find and use forms which we can experience as authentic and meaningful at a particular time and in a particular place. For abstract and general and universal liturgy is not good liturgy because it is not human liturgy.<sup>33</sup>

In the process of discovering these authentic forms, care must be taken not to lose sight of the theological dimension in the eagerness to be contextual. While discussing failures of the Western church's liturgical reformation of recent years, Hoon offers a helpful warning. Hoon insists that, "Much liturgical reform seems misconceived... because our reformers have brought more sensitivity to culture than theological discrimination."<sup>34</sup>

While Hoon sees theology as a storehouse of universal truths and, therefore, as an easy judge of liturgy, his warning still is valid. Our theological considerations must include decision about the integrity of a liturgical practice with the Gospel.

There are two basic approaches which can be taken in determining the essential forms of worship. A ritual anthropology approach can be used, looking at the relationship between *cultus* and culture as it is expressed universally. Consideration can also be given to the growing

consensus among Christians as to what is essential about Christian worship. The two do not preclude each other, so both will be pursued in this study.

Ritual anthropologists begin with the well-documented theory that there is a similarity to the rituals of every religion. This congruity between Christian worship and that of other religions, Frank Senn says, needs to "be taken seriously on theological grounds."<sup>35</sup>

The theological grounds, Senn refers to, are those related to an incarnational view of the sacraments. Even though most Christians would argue that the gods being worshipped in these other religions and cults are idols far inferior to the Christian God, there is a certain universality to basic ritual actions. This is not altogether surprising since God chooses to come to us in familiar ways. One only need compare a Jewish Passover Seder and Christian Eucharist to see this use of the familiar at work.<sup>36</sup>

Ritual cannot be looked at separate from myth, however. According to Senn, and the author of this study concurs, humans tend to construct experience into "patterns that embrace both conceptual structures known as 'myth' and behavioral structures known as 'ritual.'"<sup>37</sup>

These two, together, form the world view of the cult. Cultus is, therefore, experiential. Because it is experiential, it is symbolic. Because it is symbolic, it evokes associations that transcend cultures. This is

because symbols are "diffuse and imprecise." Because of this quality of symbols, almost all are accessible to Christian use.<sup>38</sup>

This view results in a very open, very free approach to Christian liturgy. Senn is not, however, an unlimited libertarian in this regard. He suggests that Christian worship still must be Christo-centric and that those things commanded by Christ must be followed whereas those things instituted by human beings are a matter of indifference.<sup>39</sup>

Abega makes a similar point with specific regard to the sacraments. He, too, makes reference to incarnational theology when he reminds us that the sacraments were not fixed in form by Jesus. "That means that Christ intended that each people should develop each sacrament with the gestures that spoke for it."<sup>40</sup>

The problem has been that European and American missionaries acted as though the forms they had developed for carrying out liturgy, even down to the vestments worn, were necessary for salvation. They were the Judaizers of modern history seeking to *circumcise* Africans before they could become Christians.<sup>41</sup>

Fortunately, progress is being made on this front. Not too many people would take issue with the Kimbanguists, for example, for using bread made from maize, potato, and green banana flours instead of wheat bread and for using honey diluted with water instead of wine at The Sacrament of Holy Communion.<sup>42</sup>

The issue is more complicated with regards to the Kimbanguist practice of baptism. Seeing it as baptism by the Holy Spirit in contrast to the baptism of John, the Kimbanguists do not use water. Whether or not water is necessary for Christian baptism (however it is used) is less a matter of consensus.<sup>43</sup>

David Power offers a suggestion of a way to make such a judgement. He says that the crucial question for the Christian in critiquing religious expression is to ask him or herself what the core of Christianity is. If the core is content and form, doctrine and ritual, then indigenization is impossible. One can only adapt and translate. If, however, the core of the Christian faith is a "dynamics of faith which structures the human experience of the transcendent," then the number of doctrinal tenets and liturgical forms which are considered essential will be greatly reduced.<sup>44</sup>

This structuring of human experience is accomplished by the interplay between myth and ritual. Indigenization therefore, would mean that the Christian myth and the barest of rituals required to convey and rehearse it need to be presented as ways to order traditional culture, belief, and ritual.

David Power takes the position that it was not the case that one myth should substitute for all others, but that one dominant myth can appropriate and relativize all others within its perspective. The myth which is allowed to

dominate should be one which "offers greater freedom to [humanity's] creative spirit and the greater hope in the pursuit of good."<sup>45</sup>

The Christian believes that it is the Christian myth which will accomplish this best and, therefore, should be dominant. Again, however, this myth need not exclude other myths. This will be important when this study considers specifically African issues with regard to indigenization.

As Hoon maintains, the inculturation of liturgy is, therefore, not a matter of demythologizing, but of remythologizing worship.

For worship is not only mythological by nature in the sense that it can only exist as figure and form, but more importantly, the proper business of liturgy is to assert Christian myths against other myths as a way of stating the Christian vision of reality.<sup>46</sup>

This discussion now moves to the second approach to this matter of determining essential forms to Christian liturgy. This method is achieved by looking at the consensus emerging among the churches as to the forms liturgy takes.

Many persons, including Senn and Thurian, have noted a "basic structural agreement" between "ritual orders as diverse as Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican, Reformed and Free Church." Much of this convergence is a result of a return to sources.<sup>47</sup>

Max Thurian was responsible for composing the Lima liturgy used by the World Council of Churches. He states

that, while this liturgy was meant to express convergenc of his role in doing so a desire to illustrate:

the solid theological achievements of ...*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*,... the Lima liturgy is not the only possibility.... [These] convergences could be expressed in other liturgical forms, according to other traditions, spiritualities or cultures.<sup>48</sup>

Hopefully, this convergence will, as Thurian envisions, include convergence with those who have new forms to offer to the church. While it is important that the established churches are coming together in their mutual understanding and, in the process, coming to a better understanding as to what is fundamental to Christian liturgy, room must be made for the contributions of Christians from the Third World.

This section has considered two complementary approaches to determining what is essential to Christian liturgy. Care must still be taken, however, since "people who agree on essentials can still be divided by an attempt to define them, and sometimes in fighting about definitions, the essential itself becomes obscured."<sup>49</sup>

The final warning points again to why freedom of experimentation must be allowed. Agreement in principle to the idea of Africanization is sufficient for progress to be made if the African mission churches are given and give themselves room to experiment with the details.

### Conclusion

The assertion has been made that there must be an integrity between the theology professed by a church and the theology which they rehearse in worship. This discussion

has looked at how liturgy is actually primary to theology, but that the integrity the two should have makes it possible to examine each from the perspective of the other. Liturgy has been described as mission and mission as requiring liturgy. Finally, two approaches have been considered that one can take in discovering forms of Christian worship which are authentic to the African experience.

Remembering the premise that liturgy and theology must work in concert, the next two chapters examine the work of African theologians and the formation of emerging African theologies.

## NOTES

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> "Liturgics," *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English*, 3rd College ed.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (London: Faith Press, 1966), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa*, 225.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Senn, *Christian Worship and Its Cultural Setting* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Waitman Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship: Ecumenical and Pastoral Studies in Liturgical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Victor De Waal, "Worship and Theology," in *Liturgy Reshaped*, ed. Kenneth Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1982), 121.

<sup>7</sup> Senn, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> S. E. Serote, "Meaningful Christian Worship for Africa," in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, ed. Hans Jürgen-Becken (Durban, Natal, Union of South Africa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973), 150.

<sup>9</sup> Schmemmann, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> James Empereur, *Worship: Exploring the Sacred* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 36-37. Empereur credits Sandra Schneiders, "Symbolism and the Sacramental Principle in the Fourth Gospel," (*Segni e Sacramenti nel Vangelo di Giovanni*), in *Studia Anselmiana* 66 (1977) for this definition with the exception of "by means of a community" which he added.

<sup>13</sup> This is the definition used by J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 7, 9. Evelyn Underhill also describes worship as the "response of the creature to the Eternal." See Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper, Torchbooks, 1957), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Underhill, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 8-9, 17.



- 16 Empereur, 36.
- 17 Underhill, 18, 79.
- 18 Empereur, 87.
- 19 Jean-Marc Éla, "Ancestors and the Christian Faith: An African Problem," trans. John Maxwell, in *Liturgy and Cultural Religious Traditions*, eds. Herman Schmidt and David Power (New York: Seabury, 1977), 44.
- 20 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 139.
- 21 Senn, 13.
- 22 Geoffrey Wainwright, "Betwen God and World: Worship and Mission," in *Liturgy Reshaped*, ed. Kenneth Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1982), 94.
- 23 Hoon, 59. Hoon cites Bernard Botte, "The Problem of Adaptation in the Liturgy," in *The Church in Mission*, ed. R. E. Campbell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll Publications, 1965) in relation to this statement.
- 24 Hoon, 110.
- 25 Acts 1:8b and Luke 24:49b, NRSV.
- 26 Wainwright, 94.
- 27 Empereur, 109.
- 28 Serote, 148. Also see Acts 17:23b, NSRV.
- 29 P. Abega, "Liturgical Adaptation," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds. Edward Fasholé-Luke, et al. (London: R. Collins, 1978), 604-05.
- 30 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, "African Symbols and Christian Liturgical Celebration," *Worship* 65 (March 1991): 104.
- 31 Senn, 38-39.
- 32 Abega, 605.
- 33 Empereur, 135.
- 34 Hoon, 10.
- 35 Senn, viii - ix.
- 36 Ibid., ix.
- 37 Ibid., 1.

38 Ibid., 3-7, 9.

39 Ibid., 17-18.

40 Abega, 600.

41 See E. A. Ayandele, appendix to *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds. Edward Fasholé-Luke, et al. (London: R. Collins, 1978), 613 for a similar comment.

42 Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright, eds., *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 232.

43 Diakanua Ndofunu, "The Role of Prayer in the Kimbanguist Church," in Fasholé-Luke et al., 613.

44 David Power, "Cultural Encounter and Religious Expression," in *Liturgy and Cultural Religious Traditions*, eds. Herman Schmidt and David Power (New York: Seabury, 1977), 104.

45 Ibid., 106.

46 Hoon, 42.

47 Senn, 29.

48 Max Thurian, "The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima," in Thurian and Wainwright, 241.

49 Brown, 40.

## CHAPTER 5

## Christian Theology in the African Context

This chapter examines issues of methodology faced by African theologians. The theologians examined are doing contextual theology --- theology which interacts with a specific context and does not claim to be universal. There are some theologians who maintain that theology must be universal and that, if it is specific to one context, it is probably more akin to ideology than to theology. The author of this study disagrees.

Those theologies which purport to be universal are simply examples of cultural imperialism. That imperialism consists of defining one's own experience as normative for all people.

The author of this study, therefore, agrees with Desmond Tutu who declares that no theology, including Western theology, can claim to be universal since:

Theology can never properly claim a universality which rightly belongs only to the... Gospel.... Theology is a human activity possessing the limitations and the particularities of those who are theologizing.... Theology gets distorted if it sets out from the very beginning to speak or attempt to speak universally."<sup>1</sup>

There is a problem with this study of African contextual theology. That problem is that while contextual theology is probably best done by a community of faith as it attempts to understand and minister within its context, books and journal articles tend to be written by individuals. Even more importantly, they tend to be written by westernized individuals. It may, therefore, be the case

that the most exciting indigenous African theology is being done by Africans who are unpublished.

According to B. Bujo, this is not the case. Rather, he says, "African theology, on the whole, remains elitist."<sup>2</sup> If true, this is probably the result of how literary Christian theology, as handed down to African Christians, has been. Church leaders, educated by Western missionaries, have probably benefitted from the elite position their education put them in and, therefore, have not encouraged grassroots theology. This, however, is mere speculation.

Nonetheless, whether there are non-literary sources for African theology or not, this study was limited to library sources. The author of this study, therefore, must hope that these African Christian theologians have represented what is happening in non-literary circles. To the extent that they have included discussion of the independent Afro-Christian churches, each has at least briefly touched upon this subject. The distrust of these non-literary sources is evident in the works of some African theologians.

#### The Emergence of African Christian Theologies

African theology must be spoken of in plural as noted earlier. It must also be spoken of as emerging, for it is not fully developed yet.

It is always hard to declare a beginning point for such a thing. Clearly, one could hearken back to the North African and Ethiopian Christians as developing the first truly African Christian theologies. However, this focus is

on the mission churches and the theologies which have been emerging from Africa since the late 1950s.

It is easy to imagine that informally, and perhaps unconsciously, indigenization always went on in the minds, hearts, and souls of Africans as they incorporated Christianity into their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The call for indigenization of liturgy came early. A Sierra Leonean missionary to Nigeria, the Rev. James Johnson, stated as early as 1877 that the church should not be "an exotic but a plant become indigenous to the soil." He suggested that what was, therefore, needed was "a reform of the liturgy to suit local conditions."<sup>4</sup> The first formal attempt at relating traditional African religion and Christian theology was Placide Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy*. Tempel, not being African himself, though, was hardly capable of developing a truly indigenous theology. The first attempts made by the Africans themselves were *La philosophie bantou-rwandaise de l'etre* by Alexis Kagame in 1956 and, in the same year, *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent* by Kagame and a group of African and Haitian priests.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of which writings are considered *the* first attempt at truly African theology, it is clear that the emergence of these theologies was directly related to the experience of European colonialism and political independence from it. Further related to the emergence of African theology was the dominance of foreign missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

That this is the case is shown by the strident voices of African nationalists who attacked mission churches for "maintaining cultural imperialism." This was true even though many of these political leaders were themselves the products of the mission churches and schools.<sup>7</sup>

This basic context must be kept in mind. Tite Tienou attributes the failure of African theology to gain grass-roots acceptance among Africans to the fact that most of the work done was only a reaction to political and cultural domination by the Europeans. They were, according to Tienou, "theologies of antithesis."<sup>8</sup> These theologies developed, at first, in two basic directions: cultural and political.

J. S. Upkong states that African inculturation theology (indigenous or cultural theology) was the first to appear with its concern to "give African expression to the Christian faith within a theological framework."<sup>9</sup> It is important to remember, however, that inculturation or indigenization theologies are liberation theologies arising from the context of the struggle for political independence. They simply focus on indigenization as a root means of securing true independence.

Black South African theology came next. It found its inspiration in the African-American black theology being developed by James Cone and others. Its specific context, however, was the oppressive system of apartheid.<sup>10</sup>

South African theologians, especially Allan Boesak, have seen themselves as standing in opposition to the cultural theologians. They feared that an emphasis on indigenization would result in the domesticating of South African blacks. The stress is, therefore, placed directly upon becoming free of apartheid.<sup>11</sup>

Aylward Shorter makes the observation:

It is natural that in South Africa where African culture has been used as a tool of white superiority ... Africans should be less fervent in promoting continuity with tradition. Political necessities appear more urgent to them than the need to cultivate a pride in their traditional heritage.<sup>12</sup>

While this may be natural, Shorter is cognizant of the need for South African theologians to promote cultural as well as political liberation. As he notes, liberation is not only "*from* something;" but also "*for* something else. In this case, the African is liberated to become ... more fully and truly himself [or herself]."<sup>13</sup>

Other liberation approaches to African theology, including the feminist approach, have begun to come to the forefront in the rest of Africa.

#### Methodology for Developing African

##### Christian Theologies

As representative African theologians are explored, there are several issues of methodology which will be important to examine. Consideration must be given to the theologian's use of Western theology, traditional African religion and world view, Scripture, the African independent

churches, and current socio-political realities (especially feminist issues). In addition to discussing sources of theology, this study must also address the issue of who may contribute to the development of African theologies.

#### Western Theology as a Source

Most African theologians agree that the development of African theology is not a matter of translating Western theology into African terms. A. Vanneste stated that while "it is right that the unity of Christian theology should be stressed, ... it is equally right that universal theology should not be presented as the translation into many languages of a theology evolved wholly within a particular cultural tradition."<sup>14</sup>

Dickson raises an important question regarding the methodology to be adopted in searching for African Christian theologies. He notes that there is a usefulness in looking at the traditional doctrines of the church and redefining them in African terms. On the other hand, he admits that this could limit discussion to that which has already been defined by Western Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

In a similar vein, Gwinyai Muzorewa states:

The quest for an African theology cannot succeed as long as the major exponents continue to use the same theological methodologies... used to construct mainstream [Western] theology.... African theologians need to develop new theological methods and tools.<sup>16</sup>

Okot P'Bitek goes as far as to declare that scholars like Mbiti, Sawyerr, and Idowu are guilty of clothing "African gods and spirits in Greek philosophical garb."



That is, by using Western concepts to demonstrate a similarity with traditional African religion, these scholars have corrupted these traditions.<sup>17</sup>

An alternative to allowing Western theology to set the agenda would be to allow the needs and questions of the African peoples to determine the direction of inquiry. Theology would, thus, be authentically contextual.

A sub-issue of this concern about the role of Western theology is the place of denominational theology. Can African Methodist churches, for example, Africanize and still retain a Wesleyan flavor? How important is it that an African theology do so?

David Bosch is among those who suggest that, for Africans, denominational attachments are purely accidental according to who began missionary work where. He further suggests that "all artificial and denominational differences" must be overcome.<sup>18</sup>

In the South African context, Bosch is arguing that denominational differences divide black Africans from one another. In a nation ruled by a white elite who follows the maxim, "Divide and conquer," this is problematic to the movement for liberation. It need not be, however, since various denominations are learning to work together without losing their own identity in the process.

If the context of Bosch's comments is enlarged to include all of Africa, he would then be arguing that the retention of any denominational identity is antithetical to

the movement toward indigenous theology. However, since any indigenous Christian theology is going to be formed in dialogue with historic Christianity, denominational differences can also be part of that dialogue. The danger is in a denomination constraining their African members in a Western mold, not in denominational differences per se.

### Traditional African Religions as a Source

A second issue of methodology relates to the degree of importance accorded to traditional African religions. Adrian Hastings identified "the chief non-biblical reality with which the African theologian must struggle" as "the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people."<sup>19</sup>

Because of the importance given to culture among those theologians stressing indigenization, they sometimes seem to be "apologists for non-Christian theology and religion." Tienou points out, however, that it is not the duty of the Christian theologian to "rehabilitate the 'pagan' religious past."<sup>20</sup>

This is not surprising given the missionary's disdain for traditional culture. In fact, Desmond Tutu commends this position, stating that "it was vital for the African's self-respect that this kind of rehabilitation of his [and her] religious heritage should take place."<sup>21</sup>

A more serious challenge to this approach comes from Buthelezi who says that in these indigenization theologies, theology takes a back seat to nostalgia. Agreeing with Buthelezi, Bosch states, "Black [South African] Theology...

finds its point of departure not in the romanticization of the past but in the dehumanization of the black man today."<sup>22</sup>

Desmond Tutu claims that worse than the "economic, social, and political exploitation" of Africans by white Europeans was how the policies of the whites "succeeded in filling most of us with a self-disgust and self-hatred." In his observation, Tutu is pointing to a way to integrate inculturation theologians and the black South African theologians. He seems to be saying that both cultural and political liberation are needed. Therefore, both indigenization and black theologies are needed.<sup>23</sup>

A further question remains regarding the use of traditional African world view. That is the question of what validity that view has in an Africa where traditional village life has been swept away for so many and where an urban, technological life has taken its place. Are African theologians trying to build a theological system on relics of the past?

Some, like Bosch, believe this is true. Bosch warns that "indigenous culture has been mummified." If an African theology is based on this ancient culture, it runs the danger of "merely creating disembodied caricatures of once significant and functional institutions."<sup>24</sup>

Kwesi Dickson disagrees. He states that, "Africans are coming to terms with the new technological and other

developments without sacrificing their traditional presuppositions."<sup>25</sup>

Aylward Shorter states that, while traditional practices are disappearing, "traditional values and outlooks continue to live on and to exercise an influence among all sections of the populace, including *bona fide* Christians."<sup>26</sup>

Kwame Bediako offers an interesting and quite helpful perspective by which to view this issue. He says,

From the context of African theologians..., the traditional religions of Africa belong to the African religious past. Yet this is not so much a chronological past as an "ontological" past, which, together with the profession of the Christian faith gives account of... the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian.<sup>27</sup>

In Kenneth Cragg's words, African theologians of inculturation are looking for a way in which "the crisis of repentance and faith that makes us Christian truly integrates what we have been in what we become."<sup>28</sup>

Despite the protestations of David Bosch, most African theologians seem agreed that there is left, not only enough traditional African outlook on which to build African Christian theologies, but so much left that one has to take traditional world view into account when constructing African Christian theologies. Whether this traditional world view can be formulated into a strict systemic philosophy is, however, another issue.

Many African theologians, like Mbiti, have attempted to distill African traditional religion and culture into an African philosophy. Aylward Shorter, while not African

himself, asks whether this step of deriving an African philosophy is necessary. He observes that African theologians have recognized that searching first for an African philosophy is an empty venture. What is needed, Shorter states, is an "anthropologically based theology, not a philosophically based theology." By an anthropologically based theology, Shorter means one situated in the African context; one which begins not from the theoretical, but from the practical.<sup>29</sup>

One aspect of that context must be the situation of women. It will not be enough, African feminist theologians say, to adopt traditional practices, since "African tradition and culture present themselves to women as an oppressive system."<sup>30</sup>

Dorothy Ramodibe, a South African, states:

African theology has almost... [idolized] African culture in an uncritical way. African theology... seems to be mainly concerned with the "culturalization" of the gospel. Because African theology starts from... [a] patriarchal [context]..., it runs the risk of being party to the legitimization of the domination of women.<sup>31</sup>

The use of traditional religion as a source for African theology must, therefore, be tempered with a concern for justice. The biblical myth, with its concern for the poor and the powerless and with peace and justice, must be allowed to critique traditional practices. Just as Roman Christians abandoned the practice of infanticide because it was incompatible with the gospel, so too must the gospel condemn sexist practices in traditional African society.

The difficulty in doing so is in obtaining a consensus among feminists as to which are, in fact, sexist and which are simply misunderstood as sexist. Such a consensus will emerge in time.

### Scripture as a Source

Besides the role of culture, the role of Scripture in developing African Christian theologies must also be considered as the third methodological question.

Fasholé-Luke identifies scripture as one of the four main sources for developing African theology being used by African theologians and pronounces that the Bible is accepted by all as "the primary and basic source for the development of African Christian theologies."<sup>32</sup>

Appiah-Kubi and Torres, in their book, *African Theology en Route*, affirm that the Bible is primary in the development of African Christian theologies and then contend that "no theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture."<sup>33</sup>

In a similar vein, members of a WCC colloquium reported that "there were those who warned against the danger of making the context *alone* decisive for our thinking and teaching since there is a biblical hard core of historical fact and witness that must be taken seriously."<sup>34</sup>

It will have to be remembered, however, that the Bible itself is multiform and that there is still no consensus in "distinguishing what is essential from what is accidental" within its pages.<sup>35</sup>

Fasholé-Luke identifies three approaches to the scriptures. Biblical literalism represents the first. The second sees a relationship with Jesus Christ as primary, thus implying that the Old Testament is unnecessary to Christianity. The Old Testament may just as easily be replaced with the tenets of African traditional religion. The third position, with which Fasholé-Luke agrees, is that of seeing the Bible as a divine and a human word. This position allows for use of modern biblical criticism.<sup>36</sup>

Of particular benefit, if the last approach is taken, will be the work of biblical scholars, such as Cain Hope Felder, Charles Copher, and Randall Bailey, who are demonstrating the African roots of much Scripture.<sup>37</sup> While exploration of the African roots of scripture is outside the scope of this study, these authors are quite credible. More study in this area would be quite beneficial in further understanding both of the scriptures and of Jewish and Christian liturgy. Perhaps the African influence on Judeo-Christian scripture and liturgy explain why Africans are so at home with certain Christian rituals.

#### African Independent Churches as a Source

Gwinyai Muzorewa claims that "most African theologians" consider the African independent churches to be "one of the few major sources of an African theology."<sup>38</sup>

Fasholé-Luke, on the other hand, says that these churches "lack a theology which bears the unmistakable stamp of mature and systematic thinking and reflection on the

Christian Gospel." Because of this, he does not see them as a source for the development of African Christian theologies.<sup>39</sup>

Sawyer makes a similar accusation that the independent African churches do not have a clear theology even though he admits that they point "the way to adaptations of Christian worship to suit the African world view."<sup>40</sup>

Muzorewa admits this lack on the part of the African Independent Churches, but does not see this as something which prohibits it from being a repository for African theology. He states:

Whereas some independent churches still lack a coherent and systematic theology, many of them have carefully and innovatively adapted aspects of the Christian faith and practice to their African milieus, although they do not have a written theology.... Thus the concern of theologians for a relevant faith can find a ready liturgical ground in the worship style of many of the independent churches.<sup>41</sup>

If indeed liturgy informs and communicates theology, as stated in the previous chapter of this study, then the liturgy of these churches can indeed provide source material for doing theology in the African context.

This should not seem so strange to Methodists. Methodists have long been said to sing their faith. John Wesley has been criticized for lacking a systematic theology. He had, instead, a pastoral theology which attempted to develop the most faithful response to the context at hand.



Such a practical approach is necessary for Africa as well. As Muzorewa notes, unless theology "enhances everyday life," it is meaningless. He describes the leaders of these independent churches as having such a practical approach. Their time is not spent in writing theology, but in "saving lives, curing the sick, and making the lame walk."<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, each theologian will have to decide the issue of syncretism with regards to these churches and their practices. Some, such as Omoyajowo, seem to be quite comfortable with these churches. He describes them as being quite rooted in the Bible. He, therefore, describes their theology as being "essentially biblical theology." Others, such as Fasholé-Luke, see these independent churches as having crossed the threshold into syncretism.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the word syncretism itself is controversial. Peter Schineller reminds us that "there will always be disagreements among church leaders and theologians as to whether or not a particular action represents a development of legitimate inculturation or is syncretism in the pejorative sense."<sup>44</sup>

Schineller further notes that the passage of time is necessary for evaluating whether or not a particular practice is syncretistic or not; and that one must be wary of allowing those in the hierarchy to make such decisions since they will protect their positions and be wary of anything which might weaken their position.<sup>45</sup>

Schineller's fourth observation, however, is probably the most helpful. He reminds us of the principle of Gamaliel: "If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them."<sup>46</sup> This principle calls us to avoid *a priori* judgments and to exercise a praxis model for determining what is syncretistic and what is faithful to the Christian gospel and the context involved.

Aylward Shorter offers some further insights. He suggests that syncretism is the "juxtaposition of elements that are not integrated." Given this understanding of syncretism, he, therefore, points out that syncretism already exists in African Christianity. There is, therefore, no need to fear that African theology will promote it. Syncretism is far more likely in the current situation where "there is no real communication or dialogue between religious systems. We have too much syncretism already, as it is, and this came about without the assistance of an African theology."<sup>47</sup>

The concern about syncretism may, therefore, be overstated. It is, however, still an issue raised by theologians and the validity of such claims must be considered.

#### Socio-political Reality as a Source

Many contextual theologies today are based in the socio-political reality of oppression. Feminist, womanist,

North American Black, and Latin American liberation theology are a few such examples.

One consideration for African theology must be the role the current socio-political context will play in the development of African theologies. South African theologians want, of course, to very strongly tie their theology with the context of apartheid.

African feminist theologians, such as Mercy Amba Odoyuye, want any African theology to emphasize the need to liberate women. According to them, any theology that, in its desire to inculturate, accepts sexist attitudes and practices has failed in its task.

Other theologians are looking to issues of human rights, the existence of political instability, urban migration, and other current issues to provide the context for African theology.

#### Participants in Developing African Christian Theologies

Finally, this discussion must deal with the issue of who may be allowed to participate in developing African Christian theologies. The South African theologians identify African theology as *black theology*, and, therefore, as something to which only black Africans can contribute.<sup>48</sup>

Harry Sawyerr, on the other hand, proposes a very wide boundary for who may participate in such development. He suggests that anyone who shares a love for Africa may make a genuine contribution.<sup>49</sup>

Fasholé-Luke also advocates this latter view. He goes as far as to state that the "theological insights" of the "white oppressors" must be considered if truly "genuine and relevant" South African theology is to result.<sup>50</sup>

Muzorewa is less clear. He makes the criteria for participation in the formation of African theology as having a "genuine African outlook," but does not clearly define what constitutes this outlook.<sup>51</sup>

It is certainly true that non-Africans, especially whites, cannot decide for Africa how theology will be Africanized. The responsibility for developing African Christian theologies must primarily be the responsibility of black Africans. The author of this study believes, however, that there is a role for dialogue with other theologians; thus this study. Fasholé-Luke agrees with this. He declares that African theology must be seen as one set of "cultural manifestations" of the "universal faith of Christianity." This connection with the larger church, he says, provides the African theologians with a forum for critical reflection by non-African Christian theologians.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the author of this study suspects that it is the West, culturally bound in Euro-centrism and confined by Greek dualistic thought, which might rediscover biblical truths through an encounter with African Christian theologies.

David Bosch, as a white South African, says of black South African theology what can be said of all African

Christian theologies, which is, that they are "forcing Western Christianity to reorder its theological priorities and to retest many of its axiomatic assumptions. We shall have to learn to read the Bible with new eyes and new hearts."<sup>53</sup>

Before concluding this chapter on methodology, however, it must be noted that most of the work of developing African theology has been done, to date, by men. The contributions of feminist African women theologians must be included for as the Black Theology Conference meeting in Welgespruit, South Africa in 1983 noted, "The true measure of liberation in any Society is the extent to which women are liberated."<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has pointed out the methodological issues African theologians are exploring and must wrestle with in producing their own African theologies. These issues are raised here because a truly indigenous African Christian theology must involve all of the sources dealt with in this chapter. The distinction between those theologians who do cultural theology and those who do political theology, therefore, becomes irrelevant.

This distinction, however, will continue to be employed in the next chapter since the African theologians have divided themselves into two such camps. The arbitrariness of this division will become apparent in the process.

## NOTES

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Desmond M. Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology: Soul Mates or Antagonists?," *Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 2 (1975): 30.

<sup>2</sup> B. Bujo, "Africa: Theological Education and Its Implications in Africa," *Pro Mundi Vita Studies* 4 (July 1988): 32-33. Tite Tienou, in "Indigenous African Christian Theologies: The Uphill Road," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14 (April 1990): 73, agrees. Tienou says that African theology has had "little impact on daily, grassroots church life."

<sup>3</sup> Tienou, 74.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, Ibadan History Series, ed. K. O. Dike (London: Longmans, 1965), 235. Cited in Sawyerr, "What Is African Theology?," 8.

<sup>5</sup> Young, 24-25; and Tienou, 74.

<sup>6</sup> Young, 24; and Tienou, 73.

<sup>7</sup> E. W. Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," *Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 2 (1975): 69.

<sup>8</sup> Tienou, 74.

<sup>9</sup> Justin S. Upkong, "Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies," *Theological Studies* 45, no. 3 (Sept. 1984): 501-36.

<sup>10</sup> Tienou, 75. See also David J. Bosch, "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 1 (1974): 2, 5; and Edward Fasholé-Luke, "What is African Christian Theology?," *Communio Viatorum* 17 (1974): 99.

<sup>11</sup> See Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology," 32; and Bosch, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), 28-29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>14</sup> A. Vanneste, "Théologie Universelle et Théologie Africaine," in *Renouveau de l'Eglise et Nouvelles Eglises*

(Kinshasa: n. p., 1968), 173ff. Cited in Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Kwesi Dickson, "African Theology: Origin, Methodology, and Content," *Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 2 (1975): 45.

<sup>16</sup> Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), 98.

<sup>17</sup> Okot P'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi: n.p., 1971) as cited in Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 81. Bosch (p. 10) points out that Okot P'Bitek sees African traditional religion as superior to Christianity and encourages a return to them.

<sup>18</sup> Bosch, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Tienou, 75.

<sup>21</sup> Desmond Tutu, "Whither African Theology?," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, eds. Edward Fasholé-Luke, et al. (London: R. Collins, 1978), 366.

<sup>22</sup> Manas Buthelezi, "African Theology and Black Theology: A Search for a Theological Method," in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Becken (Durban, Natal, Union of South Africa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973), 20; and Bosch, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology," 26.

<sup>24</sup> Bosch, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Dickson, "African Theology," 38.

<sup>26</sup> Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Kwame Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (April 1989): 59.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Cragg, "Conversion and Convertability with Special Reference to Muslims," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, eds. Robert Coote and John R. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 194.

<sup>29</sup> Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Ramodibe, "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third*

*World Women Doing Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 15.

31 Ibid., 15.

32 Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 78. See also Fasholé-Luke, "What is African Christian Theology?," 101.

33 Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology en Route* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), 81.

34 "Report of Group 6: 'From Contextual to Universal Confession of Christ,'" in *Confessing Christ in Different Cultures: Report of Colloquium held at the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, 2-8 July 1977*, ed. John Mbiti (Celigny, Switzerland: Ecumenical Institute, 1977), 195.

35 Peter Schineller, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What Is the Real Issue?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 2 (April 1992): 52.

36 Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 78-80.

37 Even though they are African Americans, the work of Felder, Copher, and Bailey could prove to be quite valuable to African theologies given the primacy placed upon the Scriptures. See *Stony the Road We Trod*, a compilation edited by Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) which contains essays by these three scholars (chaps. 6-8).

38 Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 35.

39 Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 72.

40 Sawyerr, "What is African Theology?," 24.

41 Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 44-45.

42 Ibid., 99, 93.

43 Joseph A. Omoyajowo, "Christian Expression in African Indigenous Churches," *Presence* 5, no. 3 (1972): 10. Cited in Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 93; and Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 89.

44 Schineller, 52.

45 Ibid.



<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Schineller is alluding to Acts 5:38b-39a, NRSV.

<sup>47</sup> Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 2, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 75.

<sup>49</sup> Sawyerr, "What Is African Theology?," 23. Sawyerr credits this definition to F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 132.

<sup>50</sup> Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 75.

<sup>51</sup> Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theology," 83.

<sup>53</sup> Bosch, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Ramodibe, 19.

## CHAPTER 6

## A Survey of African Theologians

Sampler may be a better term than survey for this chapter. This chapter will not be able to introduce every African theologian to the reader. Neither is any scientific basis being employed for including or excluding certain theologians. This chapter simply provides a representative sample of the variety of theological positions being taken and pays homage to those who have been the leading figures. Western missionary theologians (with the exception of Shorter) have been avoided.

John Parratt adds to the earlier discussion of how African theology has developed in two directions. He states:

The two chief concerns of theology in Africa are... on the one hand its relationship to political power, and on the other its relationship to African culture.<sup>1</sup>

Parratt uses the terms political theology and cultural theology respectively to refer to theologies which emphasize one or the other of these concerns.<sup>2</sup>

While, as Parratt himself admits, it is an oversimplification to divide African theologians into two camps, it is a handy device for understanding their primary emphasis in doing theology. This will be helpful as long as the arbitrariness of this device is remembered.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural Theologians

This section looks at some of the African theologians who emphasize the need for communicating or

interpreting the Gospel in terms of traditional African world view.

John Mbiti

John Mbiti is described by Deane William Ferm as a "pioneer in uncovering the roots of traditional African religion."<sup>4</sup> Mbiti, a Kenyan, was formerly the director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland.

Mbiti begins his theological work from the assumption that, even as quickly as change is taking place in Africa, "traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African peoples."<sup>5</sup> Having conducted a study of nearly three hundred African peoples (he eschews the word tribe), Mbiti claims to have distilled an African philosophy that pervades all African traditional religions.<sup>6</sup>

Mbiti emphasizes that the ground of African philosophy is the understanding that Africans are essentially religious; that is, the African understands the world theologically.<sup>7</sup> The world is further understood as a place of both physical and spiritual danger and struggle. To survive in such a hostile world, humans must work together in community. Community takes on extreme importance for the African. Mbiti claims:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He [or she] owes his [or her] existence to other people, including those of past generations and his [or her] contemporaries. He [or she] is simply part of the whole.<sup>8</sup>

He criticizes mission Christianity for having failed to comprehend this philosophical base and states that this failure has kept Christianity in Africa superficial.<sup>9</sup>

Because mission Christianity came to Africa concurrently with colonialism, Africans, regardless of whether they are Christian or not, have been thrust into a technological age with which their own philosophical structures are unprepared to deal. Mission Christianity, Mbiti asserts, has failed to provide them with an alternative structure which will fill the religious world Africans inhabit.<sup>10</sup>

While criticizing the mission churches, Mbiti is firmly entrenched within them and sees these churches, despite their errors, as representing the best hope for Africa. This is primarily because these churches are attempting to deal with pressing social issues and represent a connection with historical Christianity. Both of these advantages are lacking in the independent churches, according to Mbiti.<sup>11</sup>

The author of this study agrees with Mbiti and, thus, encourages the Africanization of the mission churches over abandonment of them in favor of the independent churches. The superiority of Christianity, which Mbiti firmly proclaims, consists primarily of adding a third dimension (future) to the traditional African two-dimension sense of time (past and present). This dimension, he says, will be increasingly necessary in order for Africa to deal with modernity. Furthermore, he says that the traditional

African religions, lacking this dimension, fail in offering redemption from death. Christianity offers this hope.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time that Mbiti wishes to avoid quietism and promotes a Christianity which is engaged in battle with the social problems of the day, Mbiti warns against over-emphasizing liberation themes. He sees many of the African liberation theologies, especially South African black theology, as lacking a firm biblical basis.<sup>13</sup>

For this reason, Ferm describes Mbiti as "a thorn in the flesh for the more radical African and American Black Theologians." Ferm, however, rightly identifies Mbiti as a liberation theologian in that Mbiti wants to liberate Africans from a Euro-centric Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

#### Harry Sawyerr

Harry Sawyerr, from Sierra Leone, was one of the first Protestant African theologians. Sawyerr begins from the received missionary tradition and then engages "in an intensive study of the ingredients of the indigenous religious thought-forms and practices in order to ensure a truly effective communication of the Gospel."<sup>15</sup>

Sawyerr develops a christology in opposition to those who promote the image of Jesus as Chief. Sawyerr opposes the use of Chief for Christ because "(a) chiefs lost their pristine power and influence in the old days of colonial rule... (b) chiefship does not, *per se*, imply unquestioned supreme rule... {and} (c) the chiefs of African [peoples]

have never been readily accessible to the ordinary [person]."<sup>16</sup>

Instead, Sawyerr would see Jesus as Elder Brother. He believes that this is a quite apt image to use for Christ and that it is "in true keeping with African notions."<sup>17</sup>

Aylward Shorter<sup>18</sup>

While Shorter is a missionary serving in Uganda, his love for things African may qualify him as a genuine African theologian. He is a Roman Catholic priest and anthropologist. Shorter begins his book, *African Christian Theology*, with: "African Christian Theology must grow out of a dialogue between Christianity and the theologies of African Traditional Religion."<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Mbiti, however, Shorter believes that the pursuit of one African philosophy is futile. He wants, instead, to use the African context as the location from which to do theology.<sup>20</sup>

He, therefore, recognizes that African theology suitable for South Africa under apartheid will necessarily be much different from that developed in other parts of the continent. All, however, are indigenous theologians.<sup>21</sup>

Apartheid is not the only context of oppression in Africa. Africa suffers from unjust and oppressive economic relations between it and the West. Shorter is also aware that oppression occurs "in the context of Africans exploiting and oppressing one another." African theologies must deal with these contexts as well.<sup>22</sup>

Shorter supports Harry Sawyerr's suggestion that the most appropriate image of Christ for Africans is that of the eldest brother. He prefers this image because it emphasizes Christ's humanity and his closeness, while also recognizing that "the eldest brother exercises many powers and privileges in the African family community, becoming eventually its head. Yet in spite of this position of authority, he shares a common descent with his brothers and sisters and is a first among equals."<sup>23</sup>

God is described by Shorter in a trinitarian fashion with an African twist. The Trinity, Shorter says, is not "a theological dogma to be pondered intellectually...; it is a truth to be lived." The trinitarian doctrine of God is thus tied up deeply with African communality.<sup>24</sup>

By describing the Trinity as "a truth to be lived," Shorter is calling the church to help to "impart a 'liminal quality' to the human community, helping people to live intensely, rediscover their common humanity, and hold before their eyes the ideals which can only ultimately be realized in the heavenly condition; when all human beings share in the community of God."<sup>25</sup>

The church is called to overcome the extreme individualistic approach to Christianity experienced in the western churches and to live together in a trinitarian fashion. This is an important contribution of Shorter to African theology and to the universal church.

Edward W. Fasholé-Luke

Edward W. Fasholé-Luke of Sierra Leone believes that "conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity." Fasholé-Luke begins with elements of traditional African religion and seeks counterparts in Christian belief, "so that Christianity can be more effectively and relevantly proclaimed to the African situation."<sup>26</sup>

For example, Fasholé-Luke sees an easy connection between the Western church tradition of the Communion of Saints and the African veneration of ancestors. (He is very clear that this is veneration and not worship.) His conclusion is, "If Christian theologians in Africa give the doctrine of the Communion of Saints the centrality which it deserves, it could provide a framework for incorporating African ideas about ancestors into Christian theology."<sup>27</sup>

While recognizing the important role the African independent churches had in stimulating interest in developing African theology, Fasholé-Luke does not see these churches as a source for a local theology. He says, as noted in the last chapter, that they "lack a theology which bears the unmistakable stamp of mature and systematic thinking."<sup>28</sup>

While this may be true, his blanket condemnation of the independent churches as a theological source is narrow minded. While these churches may not have expended the energy to develop their theology systematically, what they



have done may be profitably employed by others attempting to do so.

### John Pobee

John Pobee of Ghana traces his ancestry to the Akan people and uses his study of them to translate what he considers essential in "Christianity into African categories and thought forms." Part of his search for an African theology is the search for "nonnegotiables" by which he means those aspects of the Christian faith which are universal.<sup>29</sup>

What Pobee wants to do is "to distinguish genuine and nonnegotiable elements of Christianity from European cultures and to distinguish authentic Africanness from phoney Africanness." That, of course, is no easy task and may even be impossible.<sup>30</sup>

Quite aware that Africa is rapidly changing and that there is a great variety between African peoples, Pobee sees that African theology is going to have to be pluralistic allowing for a variety of theologies even from time to time among the same peoples. He understands Christian theology as christo-centric, but states that African theologians must each look at Christ from their particular cultural perspective.<sup>31</sup>

According to Pobee, essential to any such christology is the dual divinity and humanity of Jesus. He says that "it is these two ideas that any christology, whether African or European... Akan or Ga... is concerned to capture."<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the humanity of Jesus, Pobee says, "Since belonging to a kinship group is the mark of a [person], ... African christology would emphasize the kinship of Jesus." Perhaps, therefore, Pobee would accept Sawyerr's notion of Jesus as Elder Brother. Jesus' sinlessness, on the other hand, Pobee says, separates him from the rest of humanity. He lives "a pattern of life which pleases the spirit world and is characteristic of the Supreme God;" thus emphasizing his divinity. Pobee is content to use several images for Christ out of Akan tradition recognizing that while none of them captures all of the truth, each conveys some of the truth.<sup>33</sup>

Pobee challenges South African black theology for hate-mongering and failing to remember that love is a "nonnegotiable element of the Christian faith."<sup>34</sup> He further challenges the South African black theologians for committing idolatry of the oppressed.<sup>35</sup> While there is some validity to Pobee's criticisms of South African black theology, Pobee fails to recognize that in the context of apartheid, the speaking of harsh words may not only be necessary but may, in fact, be the loving thing to do.

#### Kwesi Dickson

Kwesi Dickson is a Methodist from Ghana. In developing an African theology, he takes the approach of beginning from the scriptures rather than from African traditional religion. He says that, to do otherwise, is to "proceed on the basis of a faulty methodology;" i.e., prejudging

"certain facets of African life and thought and then seeking [scriptural] sanction... for its incorporation into the expression of the Christian faith." Such a biblical approach will result, Dickson says, in an African theology which is "fully within the Church's traditions, though it will hopefully represent a distinctive interpretation of theological truths. This distinctiveness will arise from its utilizing traditional African concepts."<sup>36</sup>

Dickson sees some universal African concepts which can be used to create an African theology which, as Deane Fenn describes it, "would transcend the various particularities of religion and culture, and focus on those basic qualities shared by all Africans."<sup>37</sup> Dickson is, therefore, attempting to get around the sticky problem with which this study has been wrestling: how to particularize without becoming parochial in the process. He will still have to be careful of culturally bound interpretations of the scriptures.

Dickson uses the concept of "the fullness of a people's humanity" as a bridge between South African black theology, other political theologies, and cultural theology. He says, for example, that South African black theology should

be part of a larger theology...[which] underline[s] the *fullness* of a people's humanity... Africa's full humanity would come not from not only the winning of socio-economic and political freedom, but also --- and more importantly --- the winning of the cultural battle, for it is the latter which defines more fundamentally the humanity of a people.<sup>38</sup>

Dickson further develops a theology of the cross from the African perspective. He describes western theologians as, by and large, having underplayed the cross and its significance, allowing the resurrection to entirely overshadow it. Dickson suggests that this may be a result of western mortuary practices.<sup>39</sup>

African thought regarding death, Dickson states, will add a new dimension to a theology of the cross. In particular, he says as a result of this, African Christians "would not speak in muted tones but in glorious affirmation of the Cross as... the basis of the Christian hope."<sup>40</sup> African traditional thought, according to Dickson, reveals that, while "the Cross demonstrates human degradation and evil, ... it also demonstrates triumph."<sup>41</sup>

Such a theology of the cross results in a christology in which Jesus Christ is the "greatest of ancestors." Unlike other ancestors, Jesus will always be "one of the 'living dead,' because there always will be people alive who *knew* Him, whose lives were irreversibly affected by His life and work."<sup>42</sup>

#### Charles Nyamiti

Tanzanian Roman Catholic theologian Charles Nyamiti focuses on the development of an African christology. The movement of his theology begins with traditional African world view allowing it to interpret the scriptures and Western Christian doctrine.

Using the African notion "that true personality consists in fullness of life or vital maturity," Nyamiti discusses the meaning of incarnation. "Incarnation," Nyamiti declares

is the highest fulfillment of personality as understood by the African. For the African, to achieve personality is to become truly human and, in a sense, authentically Black; hence, the incarnate Logos is the Black Person *par excellence*... African identity is best realized by self-identification with Christ, the Black Person, *par excellence*.<sup>43</sup>

Black is used by Nyamiti in a different way than by the South African black theologians who use black to represent the oppressed. Nyamiti is using the term simply to refer to Africans regardless of their political status (although this is included as well in the wholeness of this concept).<sup>44</sup>

Nyamiti also sees Christ as Ancestor, but he develops this differently from Dickson. Like Shorter, Nyamiti focuses on the Trinity as something lived out in the communality of Africans. This communality, Nyamiti reminds us, includes the ancestors. Using this to describe the Trinity, Nyamiti refers to the "ancestral kinship among the divine persons." This kinship is lived out "through the Spirit whom they mutually communicate to as their ancestral Oblation and Eucharist." The result of this approach is to see Christ as "our Brother-Ancestor *par excellence*."<sup>45</sup>

This seems to be to be a more successful defense of the notion of Christ as ancestor than Dickson's. Dickson notion of Christ as the Eternal Ancestor seems too dependent on the memories of the living, whereas Nyamiti posits a Christ

whose dependency is instead on the other persons of the divine ancestral kinship.

Nyamiti offers two important challenges to those developing African theologies. First, he encourages African theologians to recognize that "all the Christian mysteries are organically interconnected (*Nexus mysterium*) in such a way that it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of one particular mystery... in the light of others." By doing so, he is encouraging his fellow theologians to develop the implications of the work they have done to date, thus working out a theological system.<sup>46</sup>

Second, Nyamiti bemoans the fact that, to date, African theologies have had little effect on the local churches (with the exception of South African black theology). This is, Nyamiti says, because "the channels through which African christologies could penetrate the churches have not yet been utilized. This is especially so with regards to catechesis, liturgy, theological institutes, and bishops' conferences." Nyamiti would, of course, like to see this corrected in the future.<sup>47</sup>

#### Gwinyai Muzorewa

Gwinyai Muzorewa, an United Methodist elder from Zimbabwe, received his theological training in the U.S. While a Ph.D. student at Union Theological Seminary, New York, he became influenced by James Cone, the father of African-American black theology.

Muzorewa almost equally emphasizes both cultural and political theology thus providing a good bridge to the next section dealing with political theologians. Besides being a convenient transition for the purposes of this study, Muzorewa represents the kind of integration of cultural and political theology which is necessary for a truly Africanized theology.

Muzorewa, unlike any of the other theologians we have looked at, looks to the African independent churches for a major source of African theology. He considers the independent church movement as an important source because it "draws most of its insights from the traditional religion and culture."<sup>48</sup>

While Muzorewa admits that these churches do not tend to have a written or even highly articulated systematic theology, he considers them as providing raw material for African theology.<sup>49</sup> Citing an article by Joseph A. Omoyajowo, Muzorewa confirms Omoyajowo's finding that most of these independent churches possess an implicit, but very biblically-based, theology.<sup>50</sup> Muzorewa further declares that "one of the tests for a truly liberated African theology is whether the independent African churches will accept and utilize it in the development and interpretation of their doctrines and liturgies."<sup>51</sup>

Like Mbiti and the other cultural theologians, Muzorewa believes that Christian theology "must be responsive to African cosmology and a world view centered on a concern for

survival."<sup>52</sup> The serious difference is that Muzorewa, while a Christian, stresses the uniqueness of Christianity far less than Mbiti. He claims that the benefits of traditional African religion and Christianity are equivalent.<sup>53</sup>

Although Muzorewa implicitly denies that Christianity is necessary for the salvation of Africa, he is interested in its growth and spread. For Christian theology to take deep roots in Africa, however, Muzorewa says that it must "offer an African interpretation of survival in light of God's grace and justice as revealed in the Scriptures."<sup>54</sup>

Such an interpretation would result in an Africanized theology which combines the concerns of cultural theologies and those of political or liberation theologies. This theology will contribute to development of the "full humanity" of the people of Africa.<sup>55</sup>

While the author of this study disagrees with Muzorewa about the equality of benefits between traditional African religions and Christianity, Muzorewa does point the way forward in combining political and cultural theologies to form one Africanized theology which responds to these two complementary needs for African pride and African power.

#### Political Theologians

While the focus of this study is on the Africanization of liturgy, thus sharing the emphasis of cultural theology, true indigenization has to include a concern for the social realities facing Africa today. Therefore, this study not



only includes this section on political theology, but encourages the integration of these two theologies.

Parratt explains that the "main concern of political theology is the relationship of the church to the state and Society." He notes that independence from colonial control for all sub-Saharan countries except South Africa has changed the face of political theology. The only protest-oriented political theology is now in South Africa. In other countries, what political theology exists is generally supportive of governments in power.<sup>56</sup>

Parratt, of course, neglects feminist African theology as a separate political or liberation theology. This investigation does not do the same.

#### The South African Black Theologians

Apartheid and the white Afrikaner minority's oppressive control of South Africa has forced theologies developed in this country to focus on liberation from oppression. While borrowing extensively from North American black theologians, such as James Cone, South African black theologians have developed a particularly South African version of this theology. While there does exist a very distinct and important white Afrikaner theology (based on the Old Testament wanderings of the Israelites), this is not discussed in this study (except as done so by the *Kairos* theologians).

Basil Moore. Strangely enough, Basil Moore, a white South African Methodist and past General Secretary of the

University Christian Movement, was the theologian responsible for introducing South Africa to the theology of James Cone. He did so with the publication of *Black Theology: The South African Voice* which was promptly banned by the South African government. Moore, himself, was also banned and the book was reissued under the title, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*.<sup>57</sup>

Moore considers black theology as a theological revolt against a situation in which the Christian church has been complicit in the oppression of apartheid.<sup>58</sup> While borrowing the title from James Cone and other American black theologians, Moore says that South African black theology has not imported the "content of American Black Theology." Indeed, as black theology is highly contextual and the American black context is quite different from that of the South African black, these two theologies must necessarily be different. South African black theology "starts with black people in the [particular] South African situation facing the strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult, and dehumanisation."<sup>59</sup>

The Scriptures and traditional western theology have their place in Moore's schema, but not as primary sources for doing theology:

Black Theology... will turn to these classical sources of doctrine not for their own sake, but to ask them what, if anything, they have to say to these black people, with this history, in this situation, facing these problems.<sup>60</sup>

As is true for James Cone, the statement that "Christ is black" is essential for Moore. It represents God's self-identification with those who are oppressed and, in this particular situation, means that Jesus Christ is "the Black liberator of the Blacks."<sup>61</sup>

It is only in striving for freedom that God may be known, according to Moore. He therefore proclaims:

God is the freedom made known in our history... [and] in our own experience. But God is also the freedom beyond anything we have yet known, the freedom that calls us out of our chains of oppression into a wholeness of life.<sup>62</sup>

Besides introducing black theology to South Africa, Moore may have been the first African theologian to raise feminist issues as well. Moore recognizes the double oppression of the South African women and recognizes that black theology "cannot afford to perpetuate any form of domination, not even male domination."<sup>63</sup> Such concerns as raised by Moore have been picked up and further developed by many others in and out of South Africa.

Allan Boesak. Allan Boesak is currently President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in South Africa and another prominent leader in South African black theology. Black theology, Boesak says, asks the question: "What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ when one is black and living in a world controlled by white racists? And what if these white racists call themselves Christian also?"<sup>64</sup>

While this question is similar to that asked by African-American black theologians, Boesak's answer is

different. Rather than angrily attacking whites and demanding a piece of the pie, Boesak believes that black theologians are called to envision a new pie. He is highly critical of Cone for absolutizing the African-American experience as *the* black experience. Boesak criticizes Cone and other North American black theologians for encouraging hatred and violence and for encouraging American blacks to strive to share in American prosperity which is, as he says, based on the oppression of Third World peoples. He further criticizes American black theologians for assuming that racism is "the only daemon blacks have to fight."<sup>65</sup>

In particular, Boesak sees capitalism as being another of these demons:

While absolutely not minimizing racism as a daemonic, pseudo-religious ideology.... It seems to us that there is a deeper malady in the American and South African societies that manifests itself in the form of racism.... The relation between racism and capitalism.... Black Theology, then, must mean a search for a new social order, and in this search it will have to drink deep from the well of African tradition.<sup>66</sup>

The phrase, "to drink deep from the well of African tradition" suggests that the division between political theologians and cultural ones is arbitrary. It is. While theologians have lined themselves up into two opposing camps, the two concerns are complementary. Fortunately, more and more African theologians are integrating these two concerns in their writings.

Boesak clearly bridges the two concerns, although one must admit an emphasis on the political. He does, however,

recognize a need to affirm cultural identity as part of the liberation of the whole person:

Black Theology sincerely believes that it is possible to recapture what was sacred in the African community long before white people came --- solidarity, respect for life, humanity, and community.<sup>67</sup>

Desmond Tutu. Tutu, the outspoken critic of South African apartheid, prophet of peace, and Archbishop of Capetown for the Anglican communion, was also the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his human rights activities in South Africa. Tutu, in his article "Black Theology/African Theology: Soul Mates or Antagonists?," argues that Mbiti is wrong in denying a role for black theology in African theology. Tutu (citing J. Ndwiga Mugambi) says there something with which Mbiti would later agree: "Salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without liberation as a social/political concept."<sup>68</sup>

Tutu sees political and cultural theology in Africa (black theology and African theology, in his terms), as contradicting any claim of white superiority and as offering "the black man [and woman] a proper pride in things black and African." At the same time, Tutu continues to emphasize political liberation and to criticize cultural theologians for failing to speak to contemporary political, social, and economic problems.<sup>69</sup>

Archbishop Tutu draws strength from his belief in the assured coming of the kingdom of God on earth.

We are filled with an indomitable hope and exhilaration because we know that ultimately injustice and oppression, evil and exploitation, cannot prevail, and that the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdom of our God, who shall reign forever and ever. --- Amen.<sup>70</sup>

Manas Buthelezi. Manas Buthelezi is a Lutheran South African black theologian. He is probably the strongest critic of the cultural theologians among the South African black theologians considered in this study.

Distinguishing between cultural theology (which he says takes an "ethnographic" approach to theology) and black theology (which he says takes an "anthropocentric" approach), Buthelezi challenges cultural theology by maintaining that "too much emphasis is placed upon the African world view as if it were an isolated and independent entity apart from the present anthropological reality of the African." He believes that the cultural approach romanticizes the past (as primarily white anthropologists construct it) and ignores the current situation of poverty and oppression. Buthelezi is quite suspicious of the motives of white missionaries in promoting cultural theology.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, Buthelezi wishes to offer a "genuine theology" which originates in everyday realities; chief among which is blackness itself. Buthelezi, as a South African black living under the system of apartheid, experiences his blackness as something which "embraces the totality of my daily existence."<sup>72</sup>

Apartheid has stolen the humanity of black South Africans. Therefore, "the chains from which the black [person]... has to be liberated are the myths concerning what it means to be black and the life patterns which militate against the spirit of the gospel."<sup>73</sup>

Buthelezi does not believe that the way to do this is through cultural theology. The reconstruction of African culture will not, he says, offer such liberation and will not serve, then, to authenticate the black African's humanity since apartheid leads to self-degradation and "a self-despising [person]... is ashamed of his [or her] past."<sup>74</sup>

Such authentication is itself salvation according to Buthelezi. It is a recovery of the state intended for people by God. He, however, fails to take seriously the role cultural theology could have in restoring the alienated past of a people thus allowing them to take pride in who they are.<sup>75</sup>

While Buthelezi stresses race as the primary datum for theology because of his experience in South Africa, he also deals with poverty which exists as a result of the same racism. He addresses poverty, however, in such a way that his remarks can be universalized for other parts of Africa as they too struggle against economic structures which keep them poor. "Poverty," Buthelezi explains, "is a state of displacement from the place of rendezvous with God as He [sic] comes to distribute gifts to His [sic] children."<sup>76</sup>

Salvation is, by Buthelezi's schema, providing a place to the displaced wherein they, too, might meet God the Provider. It is "providing the poor the passport to the meeting-place with God."<sup>77</sup> Only then will the African be "allowed to realise the potential of his [or her] humanity."<sup>78</sup>

Kairos Theologians. In 1985, a group of 151 South African theologians, mostly from the mission churches, signed a document they had put together which is referred to as the *Kairos Document*. The theologians involved did not include any of those discussed above. The director of the project, Anwar M. Barkat, describes the document as "one of the most significant theological documents to come out of the present crisis in South Africa." What makes it significant is that, according to Barkat, it is "primarily addressed to the church in the form of a challenge to renewal and action."<sup>79</sup>

The document describes the present moment as a *kairos* moment --- a time of decision which must not be ignored. The decision to be made is largely between state theology, church theology, and prophetic theology.<sup>80</sup>

State theology is defined as "the theological justification of ... racism, capitalism, and totalitarianism." It is this theology which has blessed apartheid through the misuse of both scripture and theology. The god represented by this theology, the *Kairos* theologians



declare, is an idol no less dangerous than any idol with which "the prophets of Israel had to contend."<sup>81</sup>

Church theology is one which "takes 'reconciliation' as the key to problem resolution." To that approach, the *Kairos* theologians offer a very challenging critique claiming that it would be sinful to "plead for reconciliation and peace ... before the present injustices have been removed." To do so is to try to "persuade ... us... to accept our oppression and to ... become accomplices in our own oppression."<sup>82</sup> Any true reconciliation requires repentance and the restoration of justice. This is not to suggest that the oppressed should wait for the oppressor to repent. True justice does not come from top down, but from the bottom up; which is to say "from the oppressed themselves."<sup>83</sup>

The recognition of the failings of church theology also means that the liturgy of the church is called into question. Church services and sacraments, as presently engaged in, are activities designed to comfort the worshipper, not to call them to liberating action. Liturgy, the *Kairos* theologians demand, must "serve the real religious needs of all people and ... further the liberating mission of God and the Church in the world."<sup>84</sup>

The *Kairos* theologians are calling the church to choose prophetic theology. They wish to see the church acting as a challenging, inspiring, and motivating force in people's lives, inviting them to join with the God who sides with the

oppressed by making "sacrifices for justice and liberation."<sup>85</sup>

### The Feminists

It may be sexist to lump the African feminist theologians together in one group while offering certain male theologians their own sections. This, however, is because the feminists are just getting started. In most cases (with the exception of Mercy Amba Oduyoye), this author could only find a single article by each African feminist theologian. These women are, therefore, taken together as a particular approach to African theology.

African feminist theology begins as the reflections of African women as they encounter the Bible and the oppression of daily life. Both Scripture and African tradition are scoured for that which is feminist within them while sexist materials are relativized as cultural accidents to be overcome. Teresa Okure, for example, describes the Bible as having both oppressive and liberative elements. She defines the oppressive as coming from the "sinful human perspective" and the liberative as divine.<sup>86</sup>

The independent churches provide a role model for exercising the charisms of women even though some continue to be quite sexist. Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye point out that, "women have founded some of these churches and within them exercise their spiritual gifts of healing, solving marital problems, and so forth."<sup>87</sup>

Western theology plays little role in African feminist

theology and is seen as culturally biased in a sexist manner. Its use to justify the patriarchal culture from which it comes discredits its validity for African feminist theologians. Grassroots theology, rooted in the performance of liturgy, while overlapping with academic theology, is preferable to it.<sup>88</sup>

Some might raise issue with the above statements by pointing to the influence of Western feminist theology on African feminist theology. While this relationship cannot be denied, African women point out that African women suffer from triple oppression in that they are oppressed by African and non-African men and by non-African women. The woman, therefore, "incarnates the mass of the poor and the oppressed." This unique context necessarily leads to a different feminist theology than that developed by white Western women.<sup>89</sup>

Feminist theology sees the task of theology as "making women fully human." It, therefore, begins with a passion and not with supposedly disinterested objectivity. Commitment becomes the first step of doing theology. Of course, this may be said of any of the liberation theologies and perhaps even of the cultural theologies.<sup>90</sup>

Louise Tappa, for example, declares:

It is impossible for African theology... to emerge and to bloom unless both the African churches and African theology start out from, and develop around, the situation of women in Africa.<sup>91</sup>

Doing so, African feminist theologians develop a christology which is both compatible with, but transcendent

of, the African theology being developed by African men. Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, both of Ghana, write, "The Christ whom African women worship, honor, and depend on is the victorious Christ" who has overcome "death and [the] life-denying forces" which are such a part of the lives of women.<sup>92</sup>

In particular, the African woman's Christ, according to these two theologians, liberates women from disease and blood-taboos. He "transcends and transforms culture" and, therefore, does not allow for wholesale acceptance of traditional African culture where it is sexist and oppressive.<sup>93</sup>

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, who teaches at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, summarizes the African woman's Christ:

For African women Jesus Christ is the victorious conqueror of all evil spiritual forces; He is the nurturer of life, and a totality of their being. Christ is the liberator of the sufferers, the restorer of all those who are broken, the giver of hope and the courage to be. Despite the threatening hardships encountered in women's daily lives, he is the one who calls all people forth to mutually participate in the creation of a better world for all.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to sharing the above christology, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an Akan woman from Ghana who serves as Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, also stresses the communality of African traditional religion and society calling it "being-in-relation." She calls for a Christianity which embraces this communal dimension to life and expresses it with an African grammar.<sup>95</sup>

Oduyoye, especially, believes that the church must be involved in the social problems of the day:

A theology to be appropriated as vital in Africa depends on... whether it is coming to grips with real issues or lulling people to sleep in the midst of the many smoke alarms chiming on the continent.<sup>96</sup>

Unlike Mbiti, Oduyoye does not see the mission churches taking a lead in this area. In particular, she says that these churches are neglecting the bondage of Africa's women.<sup>97</sup>

Oduyoye's approach is probably summed up best in her simple statement: "If African theology is not appropriate for women, it is not appropriate for Africa."<sup>98</sup>

Josiah Young, in considering the impact of African feminist theology upon African theology as a whole, suggests that, as a result of the African feminist theology, "many issues related to Africanization may need to be examined in a new light." He mentions the discussions of polygyny and clitoridectomy as just two issues in which women's voices have been wrongfully absent. As African theologies emerge, feminist concerns and voices must be included.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

African theologians have argued with each other over the relative importance and value of indigenization and liberation. These two themes are not as disparate as some of these theologians have made them.

African theologies seem to be in the process of recognizing the complementarity of these two themes and are

integrating them through the use of such terms as full humanity and self-hood. This is a healthy move.

True liberation results in the freedom to authentically be oneself; to celebrate one's own cultural heritage as well as in socio-economic and political freedom. True indigenization results in theologies, liturgies, and politics which are able to respond authentically to the current socio-economic and political realities as well as to cultural heritage. Only when the two are combined can one experience one's full humanity.

Africanization, therefore, is an integration of these two themes of culture and liberation. Just as these themes are being integrated in Africanized theology, so must they be integrated in Africanized liturgy.

In addition to this movement of integration, there has been an observable shift in African theologies away from adaptation to contextualization. Rather than merely adapting Western Christianity to the African situation by finding elements in African culture which have parallels in western Christian doctrine, the movement is beginning from the other direction. Instead of assuming an *a priori* set of doctrines which must be translated for a new culture, the African theologians are beginning to allow their context, both cultural and political, to interpret the scriptures in order to derive truly African understandings of the Gospel news. Done carefully, this approach will yield distinctively African theologies which will complement,

without contradicting, Christian theology done in other places.

What remains now is to heed the challenges of Nyamiti to develop the implications of these theologies and to develop liturgies which reflect and communicate these emerging African theologies.<sup>100</sup>

## NOTES

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> John Parratt, introduction to *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt, TEF Study Guide, 23 (Advanced) (London: SPCK, 1987), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, xi.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1-2, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>8</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 108, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 239-40.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 98-99, 271-77.

<sup>13</sup> John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," in *African Theology en Route*, eds. Appiah-Kubi and Torres, 89. See also John Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, eds. Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), 482.

<sup>14</sup> Ferm, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Sawyerr, "What is African Theology?," 23.

<sup>16</sup> Harry Sawyerr, "Jesus Christ: Universal Brother," in *African Christian Spirituality*, ed. Aylward Shorter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978), 66.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Shorter prefers to distinguish African Christian theology from African traditional theologies by inserting Christian in the name of the former. See Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 2. This study, for convenience sake,



uses the term African theology to mean African Christian theology.

19 Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 1.

20 Ibid., 26-28.

21 Ibid., 28-29.

22 Aylward Shorter, introduction to *African Christian Spirituality*, ed. Aylward Shorter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978), 19.

23 Ibid., 17-18.

24 Ibid., 29.

25 Ibid., 31.

26 Fasholé-Luke, "What is African Christian Theology?," 98, 100.

27 Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, "Ancestor Veneration and the Communion of Saints," in *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, eds. Mark Glasswell and Edward W. Fasholé-Luke (London: SPCK, 1974), 214.

28 Fasholé-Luke, "The Quest for African Christian Theologies," 72.

29 Pobee, 18.

30 Ibid., 56.

31 Ibid., 18-19, 28.

32 Ibid., 83.

33 Ibid., 88, 92-93.

34 Ibid., 94-98. Most South African Black theologians would agree with Pobee; thus, he is attacking a "straw man."

35 Ibid., 35-37.

36 Kwesi Dickson, "Towards a Theologia Africana," in *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, eds. Mark Glasswell and Edward W. Fasholé-Luke (London: SPCK, 1974), 204-05.

37 Ferm, 72.

38 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 139.

- 39 Kwesi Dickson, "The Theology of the Cross," in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt, TEF Study Guide, 23 (Advanced) (London: SPCK, 1987), 85-86.
- 40 Ibid., 89.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid., 91.
- 43 Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 5-6.
- 44 Ibid., 20.
- 45 Ibid., 11.
- 46 Ibid., 14.
- 47 Ibid., 18.
- 48 Gwinyai Muzorewa, "A Definition of Future African Theology," *Africa Theological Journal* 19, no. 2 (1990): 171.
- 49 Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 44.
- 50 Omoyajowo, "Christian Expression in African Indigenous Churches," *Presence* 5, no. 3 (1972): 10 cited in Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 10.
- 51 Muzorewa, "A Definition of Future African Theology," 178.
- 52 See Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 99; and Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 156.
- 53 Muzorewa, "A Definition of Future African Theology," 174.
- 54 Muzorewa, "A Definition of Future African Theology," 175.
- 55 Ibid., 177.
- 56 Parratt, 6.
- 57 Basil Moore, comp. *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), originally published as *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London: Hurst, 1973). See Ferm (p. 63) for the history of Moore's book.

58 Basil Moore, preface to *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, vii.

59 Basil Moore, "What is Black Theology?," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 1.

60 Ibid., 6.

61 Ibid., 8-9.

62 Sabelo Ntwasa and Basil Moore, "The Concept of God in Black Theology," in Moore, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 27.

63 Ibid.

64 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1977), 1-2.

65 Allan Boesak, "An Ethics of Liberation for South Africa," in Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, 135-36.

66 Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 148-49, 151.

67 Boesak, "An Ethics of Liberation for South Africa," 138.

68 J. Ndwiga Mugambi, *World Student Christian Federation Dossier 5* (June 1974): 41-42. Cited in Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology", 28. See also Mbiti, *The Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 163: "The notion of salvation in African Christianity addresses itself also to the socio-political environment of contemporary Africa."

69 Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology," 31, 33.

70 Desmond M. Tutu, "Greetings," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, eds. Marc Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 25.

71 See Manas Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology?," in Moore, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 30-33; and "African Theology and Black Theology," 20.

72 Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology?," 33.

73 Buthelezi, "African Theology and Black Theology," 24.

- 74 Ibid., 20, 34.
- 75 Manas Buthelezi, "Salvation as Wholeness," in Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, 97.
- 76 Ibid., 100.
- 77 Manas Buthelezi, "Theological Grounds for an Ethic of Hope," in Moore, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 155-56.
- 78 Manas Buthelezi, "The Theological Meaning of True Humanity," in Moore, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 102.
- 79 Anwar M. Barkat, "Director's Introduction" to Kairos Theologians, *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa: The Kairos Document and Commentaries* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 5.
- 80 Kairos Theologians, 11.
- 81 Ibid., 13, 16.
- 82 Ibid., 17.
- 83 Quote appears in both the document by the Kairos Theologians (p. 7) and the introduction by Barkat (p. 19).
- 84 Kairos Theologians, 29.
- 85 Ibid., 24-28, 30.
- 86 Teresa Okure, "Women in the Bible," in *With Passion and Compassion*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Marknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 52-54. See also Fabella and Oduyoye, introduction to *With Passion and Compassion*, xi-xiv for a discussion of the starting point of African feminist theology. See Rosemary Edet and Bette Ekeya's treatment of traditional African culture in which they discover a non-sexist culture behind the sexist front in "Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community," trans. Phillip Berryman, in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 4-6. See Dorothy Ramodibe's treatment of scripture in which she relates to a Jesus and Paul who were non-sexist (p. 17).
- 87 Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 44. In another essay, Oduyoye states that these churches cannot be models for African women who have been Westernized and who belong to the mission churches. For this discussion, see Oduyoye, "Be a Woman and Africa Will Be Strong," in *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist*

*Theology in Third World Perspective*, eds. Letty Russell, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 47-48.

88 Edet and Ekeya, 10.

89 Louise Tappa, "A Protestant Perspective," trans. Phillip Berryman, in *With Passion and Compassion*, eds. Fabella and Oduyoye, 33.

90 Ramodibe, 18.

91 Tappa, 33.

92 Amoah and Oduyoye, 43.

93 Ibid., 43.

94 Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, 80.

95 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology," in *African Theology en Route*, eds. Appiah-Kubi and Torres.

96 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Alive to What God is Doing," *Ecumenical Review* 41 (April 1989): 195.

97 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Empowering Spirit of Religion," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, eds. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 245.

98 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christian Feminism and African Culture: The 'Hearth' of the Matter," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, eds. Marc Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 449.

99 Young, 80-81.

100 Nyamiti, 18.

## CHAPTER 7

## Selected Issues of Liturgical Africanization

This chapter looks at some specific issues involved in the Africanizing of worship. The discussion will deal with overall worship style, the liturgical year, worship spaces, worship music and dance, confession and assurance, sacrifice and Eucharist, baptism and initiation, ancestors and the communion of saints, prayer, and healing.

Augustine Onyeneke states:

The process of inculturation of the Christian Church anywhere must attend to the people's symbolic structure and systems in order to use them as effective and suitable vehicles for presenting the Christian message and its rituals in ways familiar and natural to the people.<sup>1</sup>

The author of this study does not pretend to have been able to do this in anywhere near an adequate fashion for any one culture in Africa; never mind the entire continent! This study will, therefore, not be suggesting solutions so much as elucidating what is involved in considering various liturgical issues.

It will be important to remember, in the words of the Zairean bishops who initiated the Zairean Mass project, "To Africanize the liturgy does not mean just adopting some customs usual in the African cultural context, but to create a liturgy which incarnates the message of revelation in a specific socio-cultural context."<sup>2</sup>

Worship Style

This section begins by looking generally at the overall style Africanized Christian worship will take. Alex Chima,

from Malawi, said it best. African liturgy, he said, should be:

A worshipful and celebratory expression and experience of the Christian faith, arising from the culture, life experience and felt needs of Africa, using the African's liturgical sense in signs, words, and feelings.<sup>3</sup>

The style of worship would, therefore, contrast sharply with the style of most mission churches. These churches tend to be highly western, which means that they are quite formalized (even those who claim to have no liturgy), appeal to the intellect to the exclusion of the emotions, ignore the body entirely, and, if this author may dare say so, are more likely to invoke yawns than awe.

Africanized Christian worship would be more pentecostal in spirit (no pun intended). The worshipper would employ all of his or her being: body, mind, soul, and strength. As a result, ecstatic experience and possession by the Holy Spirit would not be uncommon. Extemporaneous prayers that specifically address the current needs of the people, especially for healing and liberation, would take precedence over set prayers coming out of a foreign culture's experiences. Music would be lively and the worshipper would be free to express him or herself through dance. To be consistent with feminist and other liberation theologies, worship would be inclusive of everyone's talent and would, itself, reflect a new social order wherein all were free and equal. The sections below discuss the elements that

give rise to this form of worship in Africanized Christianity.

### The Liturgical Year

Time consists of both *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is measured by clocks and calendars. The telling of the events that take place in *chronos* is done in newspapers and history books, on television and radio newscasts. *Kairos* is God's time, sacred time, measured by heartbeats and decisions. *Kairos* takes place in the midst of *chronos*. In the midst of everyday time, God moves and we are moved in response to God's will. The telling of the events of *kairos* occurs in sacred writings and, most importantly for our study, in worship.

The liturgical year is one means by which the Western (and Eastern Orthodox) churches have re-presented *kairos* through *chronos*. The question to be raised here is whether the Western and/or Orthodox liturgical calendars are useful to the African mission churches.

To arrive at an answer, an attempt must be made in understanding time from an African perspective. John Mbiti is very helpful here. The author of this study initially assumed that African culture would perceive of time as circular. According to Mbiti, however, this is incorrect.

John Mbiti very strongly contends that the African sense of time is linear, *but not as understood by Westerners*. The African offers another option besides a linear progressive sense of time or a circular repetitive



sense of time. To understand this third option, Mbiti explains the dimensions of time. "Time," for the African, Mbiti explains, "is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present*, and virtually *no future*."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the Westerner understands time as linear "with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future." This understanding of time "is practically foreign to African thinking."<sup>5</sup>

The African sense of time, while linear, "moves 'backward.'" What is most important to people is not what will take place but what has already taken place.<sup>6</sup> This does not prohibit the inclusion of small cycles within this reverse linearity.

For example, the Yoruba of Nigeria believe that Orisha Nla (Great God) made the earth in four days and used the fifth for worship. Ever since, the Yoruba observe a week based on this creation myth.<sup>7</sup> This cycle does not, however, detract from the overall sense of linearity and, in fact, exemplifies the way myth interprets and affects present reality.

Seasonal changes (even if only between wet and dry) must also add to the sense of an annual cycle. That Judaism and Christianity have both a strong sense of linearity and annual liturgical cycles (related originally to agricultural festivals) suggests that the two need not be exclusive of each other. It is more a matter of emphasis. It is this author's inclination, therefore, to believe that the

liturgical calendar, in principle, is consistent with African concepts of time.

As Mbiti continues to explain the African sense of time, the role the liturgical calendar can have in Africanized worship becomes clearer:

People constantly look toward the *Zamani* [past], for *Zamani* had foundations on which the *Sasa* [present and immediate future] rests and by which it is explainable.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis placed on myth by Africans as determinative of present reality is also reflected in the liturgical calendar. Therefore, the liturgical calendar as a tool for communicating the mythological foundations of contemporary experience may prove to be quite valuable.

The question is whether to maintain the Western liturgical calendar, based on northern European experiences of time, even when it places Christmas in Namibia, for example, in the summer and Lent (from the word to lengthen, referring to the lengthening of days during this part of the year in the northern hemisphere) at a time when the days are shortening, albeit not as dramatically as in northern Europe.

The argument for maintaining the Western calendar would be so that Christians globally were celebrating holy days in unity with each other. This has the unfortunate consequence, however, of making the northern Western European experience normative for all Christians.

It could, however, be persuasively argued that a different version of the liturgical calendar should be

developed which makes more sense for equatorial and southern Africa. Such a calendar could incorporate and transform traditional African observances the way the Western church's liturgical calendar did. Unfortunately, this probably would require separate calendars for every separate culture. Some of the unity of the global church would be lost in the process.

The compromise alternative is to retain the dates of the Christian observances, but to discover new interpretations suitable for the culture celebrating them. Thus, Advent would still be the four Sundays prior to Christmas, but its observance would not utilize the European pagan winter solstice foundation. A truly African or biblical foundation would need to be discovered instead.

#### Worship Spaces

Within what kind of worship space should an Africanized liturgy be celebrated? In a similar fashion to the discussion on the liturgical year wherein the African conception of time was considered, this section deals with how Africans conceive of space.

To describe one sense of space for all Africans seems quite fraught with peril. Here, there seems to be far more variety than with the African concept of time. There is, however, one generality one can make. Africans do not separate space into sacred and secular. All the earth is sacred. This does not preclude certain spaces being more closely associated with certain spirits or *kairotic* events.

For example, among the Yoruba, Ilé-Ifé is the most sacred city because it is believed that this is where creation began.<sup>9</sup>

Susan Denyer notes that life is quite difficult and harsh for traditional rural African society such that very carefully observed practices were developed to enhance the possibility of survival. In contrast to the menacing world surrounding them, she says that "The village symbolized the strength of the community and of the known world." Often, the village is made secure by magical protection. The layout of villages and homes often are very powerful symbolic representations with invisible lines dividing it by age, gender, or clan.<sup>10</sup>

The Dogon of Upper Volta build their homes and organize their villages as representations of their mythology. The Dogon house is oriented so that the door faces north. The hearth is located at the opposite end. The floor is the Earth and the roof is Heaven. A small roof, representing each of the four cardinal directions, may be located around the central roof. The rooms in the house represent man and woman in their union, with the vestibule as the man, and the central room as the female. The storerooms on each side are her arms; the hearth is her head. The woman is also the floor. She is lying on her back with the man, the ceiling on top of her. The four posts holding up the central roof are their arms entwined in the sexual act.<sup>11</sup>

The village is organized as if it were a human being. The smithy is at the head (like the family hearth). The men's meeting house is located nearby, still at the head to the north. The family houses are in the center of the oval shaped village as the chest. The woman's house is to the west and the men's house to the north as the two hands. Altars are located at the south as the feet. Another phallic shaped altar and the stone for oil crushing are located just south of center, representing the male and female genitalia.<sup>12</sup>

"Tropical Africa," states Denyer, "has been so rich in sacred, ceremonial, and community activities that outsiders might expect a wealth of buildings especially designed for these purposes." This does not turn out to be the case. Usually, these activities are held out-of-doors. She warns, however, that it would be foolish to assume that any piece of open ground could be used for these activities. Usually a piece of land would be marked off with hedges to denote it as having a special significance.<sup>14</sup>

While buildings for specific religious purposes (although present in some cultures) are rare, shrines are quite common. The Ibo people of Nigeria erect shrines to Ala in many places within their territory. Those Ibos who live in the southern regions of Owerri, build special houses called Mbari. These are built as a sacrifice. They are abandoned as soon as they are completed. No expense is spared, however, in their construction and decoration. They

are filled with mud sculptures of various lesser deities and ancestors.<sup>15</sup>

Certain natural locations also are revered as places where the spirits dwell more potently. The highest mountains, such as Kere Nyaga (Mt. Kenya), believed by the Gikuyu to be God's earthly dwelling place, are examples of this. Certain parts of the forest and certain trees also are regarded with reverence.<sup>16</sup>

Mbiti makes clear that early missionaries to Africa misunderstood this reverence and believed the people to be worshipping the physical sites themselves. Mbiti says that these sites were not considered to be deities, but to manifest God as that which shared in their Creator's spirit.<sup>17</sup> They are, in effect, icons aiding the worshipper in his or her communion with the divine.

In a similar fashion, worship spaces used by African Christians must be considered icons. They must represent the loving power of God associated with God's mighty acts. Should these spaces be open air, movable shelters, or a permanent building? If buildings, in what form should they be made?

Africans are highly anthropocentric. According to Denyer, "villages and houses were built round people and their groupings; there was no question of people adopting themselves to fixed houses and villages."<sup>18</sup>

This suggests the advisability of open air or temporary shelters thus enabling the worship space to suit the people

and not the other way around. If permanent buildings are to be erected, it would be best if these were done in an architectural style familiar to the people. Denyer notes that, "Today, more and more architects are turning to vernacular architecture for inspiration...because it is recognized that these structures ...satisfied their communities' psychological needs far better than most modern [styles]."19

Certainly, attendance for worship at a building that looks like it was lifted right out of Europe or New England lends credence to the feeling that this is a foreign faith. Africanizing worship must include Africanizing of the worship space. The details of that will vary from people to people and church architecture will be all the richer for it.

Mbiti states that, in general, Africans construct their homes in the round and organize family compounds and villages in a circular fashion.<sup>20</sup> Denyer agrees, although she says that "there were originally more rectangular than circular ones."<sup>21</sup> This suggests that any permanent building, if constructed, should, in most cultures, be circular with the congregation seated in a circular fashion as well. Denyer also tells us that "buildings which, like chief houses, temples, shrines, or club houses, were a power focus for the community were almost invariably highly decorated."<sup>22</sup>

Parrinder adds to this that it is African art which "provides a sacred literature." He says that art "was used to interpret life at every aspect. It was employed in religious life, which was not separated from other parts of life, to give spiritual meaning and function to objects used in ceremonies of the individual or the community."<sup>23</sup>

African churches should probably, therefore, follow suit. The art used should be traditional in style. Images of Christ and other biblical personalities should either be made to appear African or Jewish.

Finally, Denyer also notes that even where buildings were built for religious purposes, ceremonies were often held out of doors.<sup>24</sup> This also suggests that, if a permanent church building is to be built, space for outdoor worship should still be provided.

#### Worship Music

An Asian, Choan-Seng Song, states, "Theology at its deepest has to be a song."<sup>25</sup> Music is, thus, far more than mere decoration to worship. It is integral to the worship experience. Music touches people at their roots.

Early missionaries to Africa brought with them European and American hymns. Though these hymns were often translated into an indigenous language, they were still foreign. The hymns were still in a foreign metre which did not fit the native tongue.<sup>26</sup> They spoke of cultural experiences unavailable to the African Christian (e.g., "He sends the snows in winter, the frost to swell the grain").<sup>27</sup>



Most critically, they often taught bad theology. Leaver offers the example of "All Things Bright and Beautiful" by Cecil Frances Alexander. The hymn originally contained the stanza:

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly  
And ordered their estate.

About this hymn and others like it, Leaver says that the missionaries brought, not only the gospel, but also a

social-cultural conditioning which taught that those who brought the message were... 'more-equal' than those to whom they had come. That the messengers were white and the recipients black contributed to the incipient racial heresy that is now tearing Southern Africa apart.<sup>28</sup>

Africanized Christianity must, therefore, offer more than translated European and North American hymns. It must give voice to the African soul as it responds to Jesus utilizing indigenous theology.

The giving of voice must include the use of traditional African instruments, chiefly the drum. Henry Weman stated with regard to the drum:

It is the African's own instrument, and one which he [or she] needs... to be able to experience music to the full.... It is more than just a matter of accompaniment; he [or she] is able with the drum to make his [or her] music into a flowing rhythmic polyphony.<sup>29</sup>

Idolatrous connotations of many of the drums creates a barrier to their use which must be carefully considered. Often the traditional connotations can be useful in communicating something about the gospel. For example, one missionary to Africa tells of the thrill he received when he

realized that the drum being used for an Advent hymn was the one traditionally used to announce the coming of the king.<sup>30</sup>

Equally eschewed by the early missionary community was the dance. Leaver quotes an anonymous African who said, "It is through them [dances] we express our deepest emotions. The African dances for joy, ... for sorrow or even for anger.... We dance also for worship."<sup>31</sup>

Dance, too, must be included in Africanized Christian worship. The question for some is to what extent.

Singing, drumming, clapping, and dancing, as Felix Nwahaghi points out, lead to ecstatic experience and spirit possession in traditional African worship.<sup>32</sup> Are they to be allowed to elicit ecstasy and possession by the Holy Spirit in Africanized Christianity? Mission Christianity in Africa has been reluctant to offer such permission because this is frightening to those accustomed to sedate, highly rational, highly structured worship. If, however, the mission churches of Africa are to be Africanized, they must take this risk and grant this freedom.

Nwahaghi quotes an anonymous African: "If the churches had been able to grasp this music and had allowed it to grow into ... [their worship] life ..., Christianity would have meant a far more serious thing to the African than a mere social convention."<sup>33</sup> Perhaps it is not too late.

#### Confession and Assurance

To determine the place, if any, confession and assurance would have in Africanized Christian worship, one

must look to traditional African notions of sin and separation. Early Western scholars, such as J. K. Parratt, A. B. Ellis, and G. T. Basden claimed that Africans had no sense of sin or, at best, a deficient notion of it. Arguing against these scholars, J. Omosade Awolalu states that their observations were tainted with prejudice.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning with the *a priori* assumption that Africans were incapable of such a notion, they disregarded all evidence to the contrary. A. B. Ellis, for example, stated that religion and morality only come into association with each other among those peoples possessing "a higher degree of civilization."<sup>35</sup>

Geoffrey Parrinder states, to the contrary, that "the morality of West Africa is entwined with religion, for the people undoubtedly have a sense of sin." He adds an important note: "Their life is not overshadowed with a constant feeling of sinfulness, however."<sup>36</sup>

D. Westerman states that "Africans tenaciously hold the belief that moral values are based upon the recognition of the divine will and that sin in the community must be expelled if perfect peace is to be enjoyed."<sup>37</sup> Sin is, therefore, highly communal in nature as are the methods to deal with it.

Awolalu provides us with a deeper explanation of how traditional African religion postulates sin. He explains that the Supreme Being and the lesser deities and ancestors are understood as having laid down ethical principles and as

enforcing those principles. Those principles are also enforced by community sanctions.<sup>38</sup>

Admitting that Africans are highly moral and basing that morality on Deity does not necessarily mean that sin is understood the same way in African traditional religion as it is in Judaism or Christianity (especially Western Christianity). The African certainly does not suffer from a mind-body or spirit-matter dualism in which body and matter are seen as evil and as that which must be overcome, subdued, or disciplined. According to E. E. Uzukwu, the body is considered in a positive light by Africans and not "as fallen and in need of redemption."<sup>39</sup>

In fact, there is no sense of a Fall as understood in Western theology. Rather than a Fall, there is what we might call a Separation. Awolalu states that, throughout the continent:

There are myths of [a] "Golden Age"... when there was a close link ...between God and [hu]man .... But then, something happened which made God withdraw.<sup>40</sup>

The reasons for this withdrawal or separation are described in a variety of myths. Geoffrey Parrinder described several of these separation myths in his book, *African Mythology*.

The Mende of Sierra Leone tell of the people coming to God so often with requests that God decided to withdraw. God left a fowl for each person so that when they did wrong to one another, they might make a sacrifice in reparation.<sup>41</sup>

A myth is held in common in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, and Nigeria which tells of God having been so close

to people that a woman pounding corn hit God in the eye with her pestle. In anger, God went away. The Nuba and Dinka of the Sudan have similar myths, as well.<sup>42</sup>

Among the Pygmys, there is a story which includes more outright disobedience. It tells of God living on earth, but forbidding people to look at him. A girl, bringing God firewood and water, waited to see God's arm reach out of his hut to fetch these items. God, knowing he was seen, left as a result of this disobedience.<sup>43</sup>

The theme of several of the myths is similar to that of the story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible. For example, in the pestle myth, the woman who struck God begins piling up pestles in the hope of reaching God, now that God had withdrawn. She ends up one pestle short and asks for the bottom one to be removed to supply the last one needed. The tower, of course, falls killing many people. There is a major difference between this story and the biblical one. In the pestle myth of West Africa, the woman is piling the pestles in order to recover the closeness with God the people once experienced. The biblical myth tells instead of a presumptuous people trying to be God.<sup>44</sup>

This difference is a highly significant one. The myths related to the removal of God and of human attempts to come close again speak far more profoundly of an explanation for the transcendence of God than they do about the origin of human sin. It is not humans who are removed from Paradise, but God who removes God's self from earth.

This removal, like sin itself, has very real consequences for humanity today. John Mbiti states that this disobedience "brought disadvantageous and tragic consequences to [humanity]...: God left [humanity]... alone, death came, and [we]... lost happiness, peace, and a free supply of food."<sup>45</sup>

Awolalu emphasizes that, according to African belief:

Sin destroys good relationship, ... upsets the equilibrium of the society, ... drives a wedge between... [a person] and the supersensible world and ... brings suffering, pain, and death.<sup>46</sup>

Mazisi Kunene echoes this by stating that "ethical behavior [for the African] is concerned with the maintenance of cosmic equilibrium."<sup>47</sup>

This equilibrium must be restored when disrupted. The consequences of not doing so are disastrous both for the individual and the community. Therefore, certain methods must be employed to remove the sin and its evil consequences.<sup>48</sup>

Awolalu classifies these methods into three categories: purification, confession and reparation, and sacrifice. Purification, as described by Awolalu, involves the cleansing away of sin. Through this approach, which includes exorcism, "sin is portrayed as a stain or a filthy rag which can be washed off or cast off respectively."<sup>49</sup>

Confession is considered necessary to avoid the otherwise unavoidable consequences of sin. These consequences include tragedy and death. Reparation, usually in the form of a fine or sacrifice, follows confession.

Repentance, understood as a turning away from the offensive behavior, is also required.<sup>50</sup>

Expiatory sacrifice is used, as noted above, when a sin has been confessed and reparations need to be made. Propitiary sacrifice, usually in the form of libations, are also made regularly to honor the ancestors and lesser deities. Failure to offer such homage is itself understood as sin.<sup>51</sup>

Louis Bouyer, in *Rite and Man*, offers a very helpful consideration of sacrifice. Beginning with the confession that the idea of sacrifice seems quite shocking for Western minds, Bouyer says that this is because Westerners have made a primary association of sacrifice with the ritual slaying and immolation of a victim.<sup>52</sup>

He notes that several scholars, such as M. Lepin, M. Masure, and Père de la Taille, explain that the death and immolation is only for the mechanical purposes of transferring ownership of the victim to the deity. It is simply a means of sending the victim from this world to the divine world. Bouyer doubts the validity of this explanation.<sup>53</sup>

He then attacks another explanation which locates the essence of sacrifice in the consecration which is understood as causing something "to pass from the realm of the profane to that of the sacred." Bouyer thoroughly discredits this theory by asserting that this statement is one which could only be made by a modern mind immersed in a cosmos where the

distinction between sacred and secular makes sense. He says that for most of human history, there has not been any such distinction. He says that, "not only was the sacred never made out of the profane, but, in fact, it is the profane that has come into being through a desecration of the sacred."<sup>54</sup>

The alternative theory which Bouyer offers is that a sacrifice is nothing more than a sacred meal. "More specifically," he says, "it is every meal that has retained its primitive sacredness, a sacredness that is attached to a meal perhaps more than in any other human action."<sup>55</sup>

He amplifies this by saying:

A sacred meal, by itself and without the need of anything else, actually constitutes the richest hierophany there is. It is in the sacred meal that [humanity]... sees the sacredness of life, of his [or her] own life, and as a result apprehends himself [or herself] as being dependent on ... the singular and superabundant fruitfulness of the divinity.<sup>56</sup>

This approach, taken at face value, obviously suffers from a bias toward strict monotheism. Nonetheless, the essential idea of sacrifice as a sacred meal is a helpful one.

If this is true, then the death and immolation of a victim is simply the necessary slaughter of an animal for a meal. Presumably, Bouyer would say the same about human sacrifice.<sup>57</sup>

Someone might, however, point to holocausts wherein the victim is fully immolated as an obvious exception. How can a meal be said to be eaten then?



Bouyer answers that it is the Deity who is eating. The purpose of whole burnt offerings is to separate the aroma from the victim that the gods might enjoy it. The one making the sacrifice, therefore, still encounters the deity in the meal.<sup>58</sup>

Noel King, while mistakenly defining sacrifice as "a making sacred, an offering that becomes divinized," nonetheless, points out that a sacrificed animal is not the only thing being sacrificed. Instead,

it symbolizes the whole action and content, from the resolve of the offerer to offer, onward to the effect on the remotest bystander who, by seeing and hearing, is associated with the sacrifice.<sup>59</sup>

Bouyer, in his attempt to identify the essential aspect of sacrifice, neglects the sense of holism about the act. The primary result of that neglect is the failure by Bouyer to include the self-giving of the one making the sacrifice.

With this traditional African understanding of sin in mind, what place will confession and assurance of forgiveness take in an Africanized Christian worship service? Will sacrifice play a role in expiation as it does in traditional African worship?

Perhaps the easiest way to get at these questions is to address them as issues of reconciliation. Confession, assurance, repentance, and sacrifice are all means of achieving reconciliation between God and us and within the community.

That reconciliation has a role in Christian worship need not be questioned. Which methods of achieving that

reconciliation should be used is a different matter. It would be quite natural for an African to employ each of these means, so the foreignness of them is not an issue here.

Confession, assurance of sins forgiven, and repentance are all used by the Western churches as well, and so no conflict exists in the use of these. The African Christian, however, would want to feel that there was power behind the ritual being used --- that sins were indeed forgiven and reconciliation achieved. Very visible signs of the healing of the relationships broken by the sin need to be included to achieve this. Confession would also be more specific to actual offenses committed rather than for simply being human and, therefore, sinful.

While quite consistent with Old Testament belief, the use of sacrifice as a means of restoring broken relationships is more questionable for Christians. This is due to the Christian belief that Jesus Christ was sacrificed once and for all for the sins of humanity and that no additional sacrifices need be offered. To offer sacrifices, therefore, is inconsistent.

Remembering the sacrifice of Christ and sharing in the benefits of salvation it extends to humanity, of course, is part of the meaning of Eucharist. The next section will, therefore, deal with Eucharist or Holy Communion.

### Sacrifice and Eucharist

It is important to begin a discussion of the Eucharist by noting, as does Bouyer, that Jesus did not create a rite of religious significance out of a profane act. Regardless of whether the Last Supper was a Passover Seder, a *chabburah* meal, or simply the last supper of the earthly Jesus, Jesus does not bestow the religious significance upon it. His words simply give new meaning to actions already loaded with significance. Nor was this new meaning arbitrarily imposed upon the former. Instead, it served to enlarge and enrich the previous meaning.<sup>60</sup>

This serves as a reminder of the fundamental nature of the Eucharist as a sacred meal. The sacredness was not imposed upon it by Jesus. Instead, Jesus took a sacred activity and enlarged and enriched its meaning with his words and later actions. In turn, this sacrament would enrich the sacredness of all meals for Christians as each serves as a reminder of this meal.

Nienanya Onwu describes Western scholars as having largely neglected "the primary covenant-context of the eucharist." It is this failure which leads many to underestimate the importance of the Eucharist, according to Onwu.<sup>61</sup>

Dealing with biblical passages regarding the Eucharist, particularly 1 Cor. 11:17-34, Onwu stresses the idea of *koinonia* as primary to this sacrament. He states that Paul is using the Eucharist in a functional manner in this passage. Paul is employing the Eucharist as a means of

dealing with disunity among the Christians at Corinth --- as a means of reconciliation. Eucharist is understood as community building and, thus, as a remedy to the divisiveness in this community. Onwu believes that the Eucharist can serve this function equally well in the African context.<sup>62</sup>

Uzukwu, on the other hand, questions the use of the Eucharist in this manner in societies which have their own sacred actions for achieving this purpose. Remembering that Jesus took what was already sacred and gave it new meaning, one can question the validity of imposing an entirely new set of sacred actions when there exists a more traditional set of actions with a parallel meaning.<sup>63</sup>

Uzukwu explains this by means of an anecdote. He tells of a Roman Catholic parish priest attempting to restore broken unity in his congregation by means of the Eucharist. Despite the carrying out of sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist, the division remained firm. It was not until the traditional reconciliation/covenant ritual was performed using prayers and the breaking of the bitter kola-nut that such reconciliation could occur. These traditional African elements proved to be "stronger bearers of the universal message of the Christ than the bread of the eucharist and the word of auricular confession."<sup>64</sup>

Again, regarding the above incident, Uzukwu states:

This pathology was healed not by the intervention of the word to explain rituals which were no longer intelligible but by reintegrating the

familiar environment [traditional symbols] with faith in the saving mystery of Christ.<sup>65</sup>

Uzukuw offers an example of such integration as he tells of Masai Christians in Kenya combining a traditional symbol of communion, grass, with the Eucharist as received from missionaries. Traditionally, grass was passed from family to family. Its successful passing throughout the gathered assembly granted the Masai an assurance that theirs was a holy community. If this ritual was not included in the Eucharist, the Masai would not have considered that communion had occurred. To the blending of ritual actions, they added words which gave Masai significance to what was occurring.<sup>66</sup>

The preface to the eucharistic prayer among Kikuyu Christians is another attempt to do a similar thing by using words from an ancient Kikuyu prayer:

O Father, Great Elder, we have no words to thank  
you,  
But with your deep wisdom  
We are sure that you can see  
How we value your glorious gifts.  
O Father, when we look upon your greatness,  
We are confounded with awe.  
O Great Elder,  
Ruler of all things earthly and heavenly,  
We are your warriors,  
Ready to act in accordance with your will.<sup>67</sup>

As a way of arguing for such innovation in the Eucharist, as opposed to a static reception of an already formed eucharistic practice, Uzukuw offers the same reminder as Bouyer that neither Jesus nor the early Christians invented the ritual actions used in the Eucharist. They were taken, instead, from traditional Jewish ritual actions.

Uzukwu wants to argue that, therefore, one may have such freedom to take traditional African rituals (especially traditional African foods) and resignify them through the Christian myth.<sup>68</sup>

Uzukwu maintains that the Christ-event itself is the only essential of the Christian faith. While Christians must maintain unity in this regard, there is much room for diversity in terms of how the Christian's individual and corporate life is lived out; that is, with regards to lifestyle, worship, polity, and theological statements of belief.<sup>69</sup>

Uzukwu's position, however, is problematic when held up to Bouyer's comments about the necessity for ritual actions to be perceived as having been the work of the gods. Bouyer makes it clear that, universally, ritual actions are considered to be of divine origin and that, if they were not considered so, they would soon cease to be observed.<sup>70</sup>

The issue, then, is whether fashioned liturgies which combine traditional African and traditional Christian ritual actions will be seen as too contrived; too much of human origin; or whether the divine origin of each set of ritual actions will carry over in an integrated ritual. The success depicted in Uzukwu's accounts suggests that it is possible to combine the two and retain the sense that what is happening is transcendent to the immediate experience.

Worship which is authentic to the cultural and socio-political context of a people will seem far less contrived

than an artificially imposed one taken out of context from another culture and socio-political reality. To now create such liturgical forms is, therefore, not to contrive, but to express the transcendent and the human response to it. Certainly, there will be experiments along the way which will fail this test and will prove to have indeed been contrived, but that which is of God will prosper. Since God does not create liturgical forms and deliver them to humanity, humanity has no other choice but to fashion liturgy.

An additional issue will be quite essential in dealing with the Eucharist in an African context. It is one already touched upon with Onwu's discussion of the Eucharist as *koinonia*. That is the issue of whether Onwu is correct, or whether the Eucharist is, instead, primarily to be seen as sacrifice, *anamnesis*, proclamation, or celebration.

If Bouyer's notion that sacrifice is essentially a sacred meal is correct, then the Eucharist naturally has this element. Whether it is to be understood primarily as sacrifice and, if so, of whom, is another matter.

Onwu offers an interesting explanation of the obvious fact that Jesus knows he is about to be killed when he institutes this sacrament. According to Onwu, Jesus, knowing he is to die, is concerned about the continuance of his relationship with the disciples and of their relationship with each other. The Last Supper is, therefore, an attempt to establish a covenant between them

all which will transcend his death. He likens this to a dying African father organizing his family into a feast in order to give them his final instructions.<sup>71</sup>

The African sense of communal existence naturally unites with the Eucharist as a covenant meal establishing, maintaining, and strengthening community. It would, therefore, seem that an Africanized Eucharist should be celebrated within the context of an actual meal in order to emphasize it as a covenant meal.

In fact, this may be the greatest contribution African Christianity can offer to the larger church's understanding of this sacrament. Christians, in the West, have lost the sense of the sacrament as a sacred meal. With its loss has come the loss of *koinonia* that ought to be engendered by the celebration of this sacrament. The focus, in this chapter, however, is not on Christianity in North America and Europe, but in Africa. In the next and final chapter, this discussion will continue with a look at the contributions Africanized Christianity can offer to the church.

#### Initiation and Baptism

The issue of initiation is an extremely important one for the Christian Church and for African society. This section examines traditional African initiation practices and considers what their implications might be for Africanized Christian worship practices. Since the traditional initiation practices of Christianity have included the sacrament of Baptism and the sacrament/rite of



confirmation (as well as First Communion in some traditions), these will need to be considered. Finally, the issue of whether the Eucharist or Baptism is the primary sacrament of the church (or whether this is a significant question) must be discussed.

To begin discussing the African traditional initiation practices, the importance of the African *sensus communis* must be noted. Belonging and relatedness is essential to the African. One's identity, as previously noted, is not individualistic, but communal.<sup>72</sup>

Josiah Young states, "Status in society... is determined by one's relationship to certain *rites de passage*."<sup>73</sup> By status, Young is referring to this relatedness. It is the initiation rite which signifies one's belonging. It is, in fact, the way in which the individual fully unites himself or herself to the community. The initiation is, therefore, quite essential to African traditional religion.

Likewise, any Christian initiatory ritual used in Africa must also recognize the necessity of bestowing a communal identity. The ritual itself must, therefore, be highly communal. Noel King describes the initiatory practices of the Swahili of the central coast of Tanzania. King explains that boys, ages 5-7, are taken to initiation camps away from the village. These camps, he says, "are valuable for producing oneness." The very first action these boys will undertake is the sweeping of the graves of

the ancestors: the *wazee* (old ones). The communal nature of this initiation includes even these ancestors. The boys gain strength from the support of all of the community, living and dead. During the time at the camps, the boys are instructed in the things they need to know to function as an adult in their society, including sexual instruction. Much of this instruction occurs via masked dancers. Women and the uninitiated are excluded from these camps. At the same time, the boy undergoing initiation is referred to as a *mwari* (maiden). Only after circumcision, performed without anaesthesia, does the "maiden" become a man. During his convalescence, he will be taught many proverbs and songs.<sup>74</sup>

The girls have a similar initiation period. A young girl is referred to as a girl (*kgori*) from age 7 until menstruation when she undergoes the initiation. At that point, she becomes a *mwari*. The *kungwi*, an older female mentor, is called to aid her in instruction in the things she will need to know for womanhood. She will undergo enclaustration or seclusion. During this time of seclusion, she will be fattened up and given instruction by the *kungwi*. A time of celebration ends her seclusion.<sup>75</sup>

Carol P. MacCormack gives further insight into women's initiation in an article about the Sande secret society. Sande has the particular function of initiating girls into womanhood (thus making them eligible for marriage). Sande, functioning in Sierra Leone still today, serves also to support women throughout their lives.<sup>76</sup>

Once menstruation begins, the girl leaves her village to enter the Sande bush, a screened off clearing, that allows her to be removed from normal society. Here, during this liminal period, she will die and be born again into womanhood. Her old clothes and name will be left behind and she will undergo a clitoridectomy. This is a way of defining her gender and making her fully a woman. Africans tend to believe that a person is born both male and female. It is only at initiation when the femaleness or maleness is cut out that gender is fully determined. This cutting out is circumcision and clitoridectomy, respectively. For the Sande, the pain of the clitoridectomy is also understood as comparable to that of childbirth.<sup>77</sup>

The girl, upon arrival at the Sande initiation camp, is greeted with the words, "My child, come join society." The girls work together and learn songs, dances, stories, and proverbs that enable them to function later on in life. The experience together here will enable them to become "mature women in knowledgeable control of their own sexuality." The shared experience of clitoridectomy, "the shared pain and risk of death from infection in initiation, helps to bond initiates together into a cohesive group" for life.<sup>78</sup>

Complementary to this group is the men's Poro or *porong*. Beryl L. Bellman describes the initiation of boys into Poro among the Fala Kpelle of Liberia. When the boys reach the age of puberty, they are kidnapped by the *ngamu* or devil (represented by a masked man), taken off apart into

the deep forest away from the village, and kept separate. During this period of liminality, they are considered to be dead by the village. When they return at the end of the initiatory period, they will have new names and will be considered adult men. In between, they will be ritually scarred, washed in special medicines, and instructed in fighting, sex, and healing.<sup>79</sup>

In the descriptions of the Swahili, Sande, and Poro initiation rituals above, three elements, delineated by Arnold van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passage* as constituent of all rites of passage, are observable. He says that these three are:

1. Rites of separation.
2. Rites of transition.
3. Rites of incorporation.<sup>80</sup>

T. D. Verryyn provides the reminder that, since "the church is itself a community," one can expect to find these three elements in Christian initiation practices. What will be important is how well these elements can be enhanced.<sup>81</sup>

Verryyn asks some important questions to consider. He asks whether African Christians may participate in their traditional rites of passage or if the church's rites are to be the exclusive ones? What about new rites of passage being developed to deal with the transition from rural societies to urban ones? Are the church's current rites of passage sufficient to truly make disciples of Jesus Christ? How can rites be used to assist those struggling with the "feeling of insecurity and uncertainty as to their emotional

identity and their social responsibilities in urbanizing society with its rapidly changing cultural norms?"<sup>82</sup>

He sums up this list of questions with the one which stands behind them all: "Are we trying to form our youth for pre-industrial rural tribal life, ... as subservient tools of white rulers, ... as imitation Whites, or for their role in the Africa ...of the future?" Clearly, his hope is that the church would be involved in the latter. The author of this study concurs.<sup>83</sup>

This author, however, finds it rather difficult, as a foreigner, to answer the first two questions Verryn asks. Whether it is appropriate or not for African Christians to participate in traditional or new initiation rituals other than those of the church is something for the African church to decide.

With regard to the question of how well the church's current rites of passage are accomplishing their goal of making disciples, Christians worldwide can join the conversation. Eliadé states that, "Certain initiatory themes exist in Christianity; but the various Christian denominations no longer regard them as possessing the values of initiation." This is not to say, however, that they ought not to possess these values.<sup>84</sup>

There are many ways in which Christian initiatory practices could be enhanced to better achieve the desired goal of making disciples by regaining a more consciously

initiatory flavor. Traditional African initiation practices provide a guide in this endeavor.

There may, for example, be great value in providing a period of seclusion for the training of initiates into Christianity. While simply forming a group or class for catechesis is a kind of separation, a more physical seclusion might prove to be quite valuable. The liminal quality achieved helps to bind together those who go through this experience together in a way that mere class time could not.

There certainly would be immeasurable value in making the catechumenate experience more communal. Rather than a single pastor or catechist teaching a class, others might become involved as well. Certainly, the congregation could become involved through some ritual of support and encouragement for the catechumens and with a strong celebration of their incorporation into the community at the end of the initiation. Fortunately, some congregations have already begun to recognize this need for communality in the catechetical experience and are acting to meet that need.

An issue raised by the communality aspect is how incorporated the non-initiated are to be before initiation. Can, for example, the uninitiated participate in the Eucharist and prayers of the people? Are there any particular teachings of the church that would be treated as mystery to be revealed only to the initiated?

Within the initiation practices of the African traditions, teaching is not confined to one aspect of life, but is holistic in its approach. Perhaps Christian initiation practices should be more inclusive of such things as sex education, parenting, pre-marital counseling, career decision making, etc. This might go far in teaching that Christianity is not so much a religion as a way of life.

Shared pain is a part of many initiation practices. Eliadé identifies it as one of the initiatory patterns that is frequently found throughout the world. He describes it as a "dramatic pattern comprising circumcision, ordeals, tortures, that is, a symbolic death followed by resurrection."<sup>85</sup>

While purposefully inflicting pain as part of a Christian initiation seems somehow contrary to the gospel, the use of ordeal may be quite helpful. One can imagine African catechumens undergoing a difficult trek together, for example.

Baptism by immersion may also be called for here as a stronger experience of death/rebirth than baptism by sprinkling or pouring since the possibility of actual drowning, while unlikely, does exist with immersion. The early church's practice of surprising a catechumene with baptism by immersion would have carried even more strongly the death/rebirth imagery.

Christian rites of incorporation must, like the traditional African rituals, include obvious significations

that an ontological change has taken place through initiation. Such a signification might include a name change as is practiced in some churches, such as the Roman Catholic. In addition, initiates must truly be allowed to be fully integrated into adult society.

Verryn's final question about helping to establish identities and communality for those in the midst of urban transition suggests that initiation practices might be used to form artificial societies in places where traditional society has broken down. In the situation where traditional community has broken down, Christianity can play a significant role in creating artificial communities in which "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>86</sup> Initiation rituals would be extremely important for establishing this new communal identity. These issues need to be considered with regard to the African Independent or Afro-Christian churches.

G. C. Oosthuizen describes baptism in the Afro-Christian independent churches. He states that baptism in these churches is usually seen as purification from sin. It is, therefore, repeatable and not understood as initiation. It is also usually reserved for adults. Its repeatability, however, makes it accessible to children who will be re-baptized later. Healing is often a part of the baptism ritual.<sup>87</sup>

Marie F. Perrin-Jassy, in *Basic Communities in the African churches*, offers a different view regarding baptism



in the African Independent Churches. Perrin-Jassy states that the principal function of baptism in these churches is that "it introduces the initiates into an earthly as well as a spiritual community." Baptism is, therefore, according to Perrin-Jassy, repeatable as persons move from one church community to another. The initiatory character of baptism is, thus, quite strong.<sup>88</sup>

This study cannot resolve the dispute between these two authors. It can, however, consider the implications for each being true.

Oosthuizen's description of baptism is more that of John than that of Jesus' disciples. It is a baptism for the cleansing of sin, not for salvation. It, therefore, must be repeated and repeated. This does fit with traditional African notions of expiation for sin. It, however, does not fully capture the essence of Christian baptism. If Oosthuizen's description of baptism in the Afro-Christian churches is accurate, then these churches are not particularly Christian in their baptismal theology.

Perrin-Jassy's description is more in keeping with traditional Christian understanding of baptism as marking "the entry of the individual into the community of the Church of Christ on earth."<sup>89</sup> What is in dispute, regarding Perrin-Jassy's description of baptism in the African Independent Churches is whether baptism is a repeatable sacrament. Most churches agree that it is not, yet many do not accept the baptisms of other churches as authentic

baptisms. Those churches which do not recognize the baptism of another as being valid are *ipso facto* encouraging the repeatability of baptism even though they officially oppose repeatability. Whether the repeating of baptism as persons move from one church community to another is as a result of the non-acceptance of their previous baptism or the result of a new understanding of baptism as being the door only to the local Christian church is still up for question.

H. W. Turner, in describing the baptismal liturgy of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Nigeria, notes that they do not practice infant baptism, but do employ a variation of the Anglican baptismal rite for a naming service. The adult baptismal rite includes a renunciation of the devil, as do most Christian baptismal rites, but also includes the specific renunciation of "belief in the use of juju, medicine of all kinds for thy need and cure."<sup>90</sup>

Turner also states:

This emphasis on immersion is another common aladura departure from the baptismal practices of the older churches, where sprinkling is the usual method; whether baptism be interpreted as a cleansing or as sharing in the dying and rising of Christ, the symbolism is more vivid and complete, and the ceremony is a more memorable event in the life of the worshipper.<sup>91</sup>

Turner, in the above quote, suggests that he also is not sure whether baptism is understood as cleansing (as per Oosthuizen) or as an initiation (as per Perrin-Jassy). He does, however, note that whichever way it is understood, it is a highly significant occasion for the baptized. It, therefore, serves an initiation function regardless.

Baptism, first communion, and confirmation as the three traditional Christian initiation rites must now be considered particularly with regard to what Africanizing of these rites would entail. The traditional argument between practitioners of infant baptism and those of believer's baptism must also be addressed from the African context. Unfortunately, the material found from African sources regarding this issue could have been written by anyone anywhere.<sup>92</sup> This study does not intend to attempt a settlement of this issue, but only to flag particular observations regarding this issue in the African context.

It is difficult to discuss any initiation value in infant baptism. Any attempt to integrate traditional African initiation practices into infant baptism would have to insist that the parents undergo the initiation.

On the other hand, the communality of African society makes it quite understandable that entire households and even villages would be baptized together on the basis of the conversion of a significant member of the family or tribe. Obijole notes that this "corporate personality" was the basis for "the *oikos* formula" (justifying infant baptism on the basis of Acts 2:39-39; 11:14; 16:15,33-34; 18:8 and 1 Cor. 1:16).<sup>93</sup>

If infant baptism is practiced, two issues become important: (1) Is Eucharist reserved for those who make some further decision (First Communion or Confirmation), open to all who are baptized, or simply to "whosoever will?"; and

(2) Is a second step in which the baptized can now respond (confirmation) necessary?

Regarding the first question, a closed Eucharist, open only to those initiated, would not seem foreign to the African mind. Many aspects of traditional African culture include exclusive rituals only for those who have been initiated into those rituals by passing through them themselves. This would not be foreign to Christian experience either, as many churches practice such closed communion. At times in the church's history, everything which occurred in worship after the public reading of scriptures and the homily was exclusively for the baptized. Whether a practice is compatible with traditional African thought or even with historical Christian practice is, however, not the full question. The larger question is how to be most faithful to the Gospel as understood in the African context.

It may turn out that what is called for is something entirely new such as Jürgen Moltmann's suggestion that the Eucharist be open to all as a sign of God's grace given to everyone and that baptism be reserved for adults who are ready to make a very serious commitment to the way of Christ. Such fresh sacramental theology among African theologians is sorely needed.<sup>94</sup>

If infant baptism is practiced, the loss of initiation value for the baptized seems to make a repetition of the experience necessary at an age when the baptized can respond

and be aware. The further need for significant rites of passage at puberty also encourages the use of an additional rite to infant baptism.

This is not to say that, therefore, the second question regarding the necessity of First Communion and/or Confirmation has been answered. It is quite easy to imagine new rites of passage independent of any baptismal context or to allow for traditional pre-Christian rites to be used by those who were initiated into the Christian Church through their baptism as an infant.

It is further possible to provide a way of re-covenanting without it being seen as the necessary step for the completion of baptism. While the church may be reluctant to sanction a repeat of baptism, that too is an option.

A further issue to consider is which sacrament, baptism or Eucharist, is primary. Many theologians have identified one or the other as the primary sacrament of the church. The debate is probably not complete, however, until we ask whether baptism, Eucharist, or preaching is primary. This has tended to be answered along denominational lines according to the practices of the church. For example, Baptists have elevated Baptism to the primary sacrament, Presbyterians and Methodists the sermon, and Roman Catholics the Eucharist.

African theologians, however, must eye their denominational practices suspiciously and decide for

themselves whether the argument is even necessary. Perhaps there is a way to hold pulpit, font, and table on an equal footing with each other as three means of grace. At the very least, this could be architecturally symbolized by careful placement of these items of chancel furniture such that none was more prominent and so that all three were constantly present. Again, it would be good for this to be addressed by some African theologians.

Before leaving the sacraments to discuss ancestor veneration, this study must also note that the sacraments have been very tied up, in the West, with the issue of ordination. An ordained minister has been considered by most western churches to be necessary in order for the sacraments to be observed. Africanization of the sacraments may very well call this requirement into question. Africans seem to be more concerned with charismatic authority than with institutional authority and with the human need for the sacraments rather than with institutional restrictions to their use. This may have far reaching effects in how the ordained ministry will be structured if it is deemed necessary at all. That, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

#### Ancestors and the Communion of Saints

This study now turns to consideration of the role of ancestor veneration in Christian liturgical practices. The WCC sub-unit on Renewal and Congregational Life stated that, "The Church of Jesus Christ will guard and affirm all that

is positive in a culture; it will challenge and criticize all that runs counter to God's design."<sup>95</sup> The question, of course, will be whether ancestor veneration is something to affirm or to criticize.

Serote stated,

Worship without the thought of ancestors was inconceivable.... Africa believes that they are not dead, but that they exist somewhere... and that in times of trouble they can help.... Africa entered the Christian era, but it did not forget its spiritual worship past.... We cannot deny the existence of these ancestry, nor can we just blot them out of our memory. Their memory is natural and quite innocent.<sup>96</sup>

At first, Harry Sawyerr did not see the ancestor cult as innocent as he considers that the ancestral rites are ancestor *worship* and, thus, idolatrous.<sup>97</sup> Sawyerr would later admit, "We can ...venerate the ancestors, but not pour libations to them."<sup>98</sup>

Jean-Marc Éla counters Sawyerr and the missionary's traditional attack against ancestor worship. He points out that the dead are not considered as gods nor as hostile ghosts, but as members of the family. He states that, when people offer libations, they are quite conscious that "they are not worshipping the dead, but are reliving a form of kinship with them." It would, therefore, "be far too hasty a judgment to characterize as 'pagan,' let alone 'idolatrous,' what is no more than an anthropological reality."<sup>99</sup>

Éla, therefore, concludes that the Church should not only stop discouraging ancestor veneration, but actively

promote it while complementing it with the gospel. By such assimilation of this practice, "the Church [will be] able to purify, transfigure, and save it."<sup>100</sup>

Éla is correct when he says that this is not simply a matter of equating the ancestors with the communion of saints and certainly not with canonical saints of the church. The mission churches cannot simply offer All Saints, All Souls Day, or even saint days as a substitute for the ancestors. Much more extensive ways of officially including veneration of one's ancestors into the regular worship of the church must be developed.<sup>101</sup>

Ignatius Zvarerashe, a Zimbabwean Jesuit priest, categorically states that inculturation in Africa requires the inclusion of ancestor veneration in Christian worship. This is because "to touch the African at the deepest level, to touch his [or her] roots, is to touch his [or her] ancestral cult." Zvarerashe suggests that the development of eucharistic prayers with reference to the help ancestors can give and praying for the ancestors would be one important step in accomplishing this.<sup>102</sup>

While this is but one small step, it is appropriate since, at the Eucharist, Christians remember that they come to a table crowded with all the faithful of every time and place and feast together in anticipation of that time when all shall gather at the table of the Lord in his kingdom.

While prayers for the departed are not common in the Protestant churches, the suggestion herein is that such



prayers be offered. Fasholé-Luke declares that we cannot "simply dismiss this suggestion as unbiblical" and, in fact, should consider it as "a necessary Christian duty in Africa."<sup>103</sup> Before concluding this section, it should be noted that "in newly drafted Eucharistic rites in Zaire and Tanzania, the ancestors are invoked and invited to be witnesses of the liturgical action."<sup>104</sup>

### Prayer

Prayer has always been central to African religion. It will, therefore, need to hold that same central position in Africanized Christian worship. Mbiti describes these traditional prayers by saying:

One of the most outstanding features of these prayers is the poetical form which most of them take. This is probably the result of their long usage which has given them the most suitable form for memorization and recitation.<sup>105</sup>

Magesa, however, states that African prayers, because of their high emotional content, were spontaneous.<sup>106</sup> Magesa is incorrect in arguing that only a spontaneous prayer would be capable of expressing high emotion. While it is true that the Lord's Prayer, for example, can be said rote without feeling; it is also true that, in the right circumstances, it can be a highly emotional prayer.

Prayer, in African churches, must be entered into often and with confidence that it makes a difference. Prayer must employ local idiom. This means far more than translating European and American prayers into the local language. It means coming from the opposite direction; that is, coming

out of the local idiom and symbolic structure in dialogue with the scriptures in order to arrive at prayers which truly pour out the African soul before the throne of grace.

Nwahaghi offers the example of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. He states that it is "spiritually deficient for the Igbo Christians of the Anglican Church" and further says that "the translation of the book into Igbo does not remedy its deficiency. Its spiritual and cultic deficiencies derive from the fact that it is 'Anglican,' that is it is English and it is prepared for English worshippers [and not for Igbo worshippers]."107

Furthermore, God must be shown through what is prayed for to be a God who cares about everything, no matter how insignificant.

Prayers for healing must be foremost among those used and healing must be expected. The next section will deal with issues of healing in worship.

Before concluding this section, however, it is essential to note that healing includes more than the physical healing of the body. It includes the healing of relationships and nations as well. Thus, prayers for healing would also include prayers for justice and liberation. They would be used to celebrate victories and to pray for endurance in the struggle. Prayer, thus, becomes a tool for liberation.

### Healing

The importance of healing in the African independent churches has already been noted. It was further noted that some have said that the failure of the mission churches to exercise a healing ministry through their worship has driven many away from them into the independent churches.

Shorter states, "Health and healing are... important values in African traditional religion, connected as they are with the fundamental theme of life. Sickness for the African is a diminution of life, a threat posed to life, and healing is an activity second only to the giving of life."<sup>108</sup>

Most of the mission churches have engaged in a healing ministry, but one which only consisted of operating hospitals and clinics. Andrew Olu Igenoza, while valuing both modern medicine and its practitioners, nonetheless asks whether this is the only medium of healing which God can use. He then states:

To answer in the affirmative, especially in relation to an African *milieu*, is to completely overlook the spiritual dimension of sickness and healing so readily recognised by Africans.<sup>109</sup>

Traditional methods of healing included divination as a form of diagnosis. While the modern African may believe in physical causation for disease as explained by modern science, the African world view will also lead him or her to ask for the spiritual cause. That a spiritual cause may be assumed means that an African will not be satisfied with a physical cure alone. Healing requires religious ritual as

well.<sup>110</sup> As Bolaji Idowu states, then, "In matters concerning providence, healing and general well-being,... most Africans still look to their religions as 'the way.'"<sup>111</sup>

Igenoza is one of many African Christians who believe that recourse by Christians to herbal medicine is fine, while recourse to divination, charms, and the divinities is anathema. He bases this decision on biblical injunctions against idolatry, magic and sorcery. Because even the herbal treatments have pagan associations, he says they must be "*de-magicalised, de-daemonished but christened.*" By this, Igenoza is suggesting that herbs be administered in Christ's name, that divination be replaced with prayer, and that Christian prophets and healers be consulted rather than traditional diviners and healers. Igenoza further suggests that modern scientific medicine also be christened by making it clear that it is still God's hand which does the healing.<sup>112</sup>

Prayers or healing, accompanied by the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil, could be a part of every Christian worship service, but especially in Africa where healing is seen as so constitutive of a religious experience.

While the above section may result in charges of encouraging syncretism, two things need to be kept in mind. First, many African Christians already are participating in a syncretistic approach to healing and Christianity in which

traditional healers are sought out to fill the gap mission Christianity has created in its neglect of healing. Healing services would dissolve such syncretism, rather than creating it. Secondly, such healing is quite biblical. Scripture warrants make healing prayer, the laying on of hands, and anointing normative for Christians. The total reliance on modern Western medical technology is actually more syncretistic if that word is understood as referring to any corruption of biblical Christianity by cultural influences.

### Conclusion

There is much work left to be done if African Christians are to truly worship in forms consistent with African theology's desire to promote full humanity for Africans through indigenization and liberation. Joseph Healey says, "The actual praxis in most parts of Africa seems to show that inculturation is more at the level of *talking about* liturgy than *doing* liturgy."<sup>113</sup>

Most of this work will need to happen on the local church level. Anscar Chupungco is correct in declaring, "Liturgical adaptation is a task that belongs, in the first place, to the local churches. It is their responsibility for which they should take the initiative."<sup>114</sup>

When this occurs, not only will Africa rejoice, but the whole church will be touched. In the words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, "Faithful to her [Africa's, in this case] own tradition and at the same time conscious of her

universal mission [the church's], she [the African church] can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs too."<sup>115</sup>

The next chapter will look at the contribution that Africanized Christianity can make to the world church.

## NOTES

## Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> Augustine Onyeneke, "Igbo Inculturation: The *Omu* Liturgical Use," *African Ecclesial Review* 30 (Feb. 1988): 3.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the permanent committee of the Zairean bishops, 1969. Cited in Raymond Moloney, "The Zairean Mass and Inculturation," *Worship* 62 (Sept. 1988): 433-42.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Chima, "Africanizing the Liturgy: Where Are We Twenty Years After Vatican II?," *African Ecclesial Review* 25, no. 5 (Oct. 1983): 280-81.

<sup>4</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Mythology* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Denyer, *African Traditional Architecture: An Historical and Geographic Perspective* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1978), 16, 19-22.

<sup>11</sup> See Parrinder, *African Mythology*, 48, 68-69; and Denyer, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Denyer, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Parrinder, *African Mythology*, 78; and Denyer, 52-53, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Parrinder, *African Mythology*, 79, 111, 114-15.

<sup>17</sup> See Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Denyer, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>20</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108.

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- 46 Awolalu, 283.
- 47 Quoted in [Donald Chinula], "African Thought Conference," *Newsletter of the Center for Process Studies*, Spring 1988, 7.
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- 69 Ibid., 101.
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104 Shorter, introduction to *African Christian Spirituality*, 25.

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106 Laurenti Magesa, "African Culture and Spontaneous Prayer," in Shorter, *African Christian Spirituality*, 109.

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109 Andrew Olu Igenozu, "Medicine and Healing in African Christianity: A Biblical Critique," *African Ecclesial Review* 30 (Feb. 1988):13.

110 Ibid., 16-18.

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113 Joseph G. Healey, "Inculturation of Liturgy and Worship," *Worship* 60 (Sept. 1986): 412-23.

114 Anscar J. Chupungo, "Adaptation of the Liturgy to the Culture and Tradition of the People," *African Ecclesial Review* 27 (Feb. 1985): 59.

115 Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 58. Cited in Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," *African Ecclesial Review* 32 (Dec. 1990): 346. He lists his source of this document as W. M. Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 264.

## CHAPTER 8

African Christianity's Contribution  
to the World Church

The more specific one is to a context, the more universal one actually becomes. As a preacher, the author of this study knows (for example) that one can talk about forgiveness in general and end up speaking to no one or one can tell the story of one real person extending forgiveness to another real person and speak powerfully to everyone. In a similar fashion, the more African African Christianity becomes, the more universal its message will be.

It is this author's further contention that even now, while the process of Africanizing the mission churches is far from complete, the African church has much to offer to the rest of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The explosive growth of the church in Africa alone gives the church there the authority to speak and to have the European and American churches listen. In this way, mission really is a partnership in the gospel --- each church sharing its strengths with the others that, together, the church may go on from strength to strength.

Churches around this globe should take heed and listen to what the African church brings to the Body of Christ. This chapter will, therefore, address some of these areas of contribution.

Cultural Theology

Western dominance of theology has been severely challenged by liberation theologians. These theologians

have argued that there is no such thing as universal, non-partisan theology. The Western claim that their theology is such only serves the cause of injustice. Liberation theologians, be they black Americans, Latin Americans, or feminists, begin with the assumption that all theology has a location and that it is always politically motivated.

While liberation theologians have been quick to examine, call for, and work for socio-political change, they have been, according to Eugene Hillman, "slow to appreciate the concerns of Africans ... with conventional Western Christianity's perennial insults to their cultures."<sup>1</sup>

Hillman suggests that the Latin American theologians, in particular, have neglected the destruction of the Amerindian cultures in their locales and need to address this issue if their theology is truly to be liberating of the "least of these." His further suggestion is that, perhaps, the model of African theology can assist them in doing so.<sup>2</sup>

African theology can also show Westerners that it is presumptuous to assume that theology undertaken from the Western perspective is a universal theology to which all must ascribe.

### Peculiar African Insights

As noted previously, there is a movement among African theologians away from trying to adapt Western theology, liturgy, and biblical interpretation to the African context instead working from the other direction. If this movement

continues and grows, the fresh insights Africa will have to offer will be nothing short of incredible.

The attempt to fit new wine into old wineskins is doomed to failure. If Africans can start from their location and approach the scriptures and traditional theology with the question, "What do these have to say to our context?," they will help all of us to better discern the meaning of the Christ event.

Already the African theologians challenge the Westerner's individualistic approach to the scriptures and to soteriology and ecclesiology. This will be dealt with more extensively further on in this study.

These same theologians, especially those who take the African independent churches seriously, invite the western churches to enlarge their sense of pneumatology. The neglect of the Holy Spirit has been a serious weakness of mainline western Christianity.

As scholars continue to reveal African connections with Israel and with Jesus, credence is lent to interpretations of the scriptures from an African perspective. What riches will be revealed by using this particular lens through which to view the scriptures have only been hinted at so far.

#### Contextual Liturgy

The African churches make another valuable contribution to the world church by reminding us that liturgy ought to be contextual. Liturgy must be indigenized for every location.

While every worship practice must be questioned as to whether it communicates the theology it is intended to communicate, this does not mean inflexibility. On the contrary! Such theological examination will serve to provide a discipline to worship, constraining worshippers and their leaders so that they are not doing whatever they like, but prodding the church to develop new and more appropriate liturgical forms.

This flexibility allows worship to serve as a way to ease people through times of transition, to comfort them in distress, and/or to motivate them to action for liberation. As Africanized liturgy can serve to assist rural Africans in diaspora in the cities to make such a transition, worship can be similarly helpful in cultural transition elsewhere.

For this to truly happen, worship must be holistic. It must deal with and utilize body, mind, and soul. (This statement may still be too Western, suggesting that each of these parts can be dissected and separately examined or exercised.) This study, therefore, turns now to holistic worship as a contribution of the African churches.

#### Holistic Worship

As noted in the previous chapter, Africans worship with body, mind, and soul. Westerners, on the other hand, pretend, at least in worship, to have no bodies. Westerners live a mind-body dualism in which the body represents all that is wrong with us and, therefore, feel that this corrupt part of them does not really belong at worship.



Alex Chima says, "While ... Muslim[s] leave their shoes outside... the house of worship, ...[Western] Christians leave our bodies outside."<sup>3</sup> At worship on Sunday morning, Western Christians piously carry on the charade that they are incorporeal. Africans, on the other hand, when unrestrained, are very corporeal in their worship and remind the rest of the church that the Creator desires to be worshipped by all that which God created and declared as good.

Western worshippers, Chima notes, not only confuse proper worship with the avoidance of anything bodily, but are also very suspicious of the display of emotions. Knowing the ease with which emotions can be manipulated, Western Christians tend to avoid them altogether. Worship for most Westerners is a very staid affair.<sup>4</sup>

Africans seek to bring to worship all of their emotions and to express them before God. This is because the African conceives of and experiences life in a unified fashion. He or she does not experience the mind-body dualism or emotional-rational dualism of the European.<sup>5</sup>

Worshipping in this way allows a ministry of presence to take place in which God is present in the worshipper's emotional state, receiving him or her just as he or she is, and sending the worshipper away cleansed and made whole. This is not to denigrate the place of the mind in worship. It is only to say that the African church offers the West,

and especially the Protestant West, a corrective balance to an overly intellectual and didactic experience of worship.

That is a corrective badly needed for the excessive verbiage of Western Christian (particularly Protestant) worship. Chima says, "Nothing diminishes the power of liturgical symbols... more than words piled on words piled on words."<sup>6</sup>

Africa's stress on holistic worship, therefore, has much to offer to liturgical renewal throughout Christendom.<sup>7</sup>

#### Emphasis on Healing

The mainline Western churches have tended to ignore the healing aspect of the church's mission. As noted in the previous chapter, the church has seconded that responsibility entirely to secular scientific medicine. Western worship of these medical techniques has caused Westerners to approach the biblical stories of healing with extreme skepticism. Most mainline Western preachers find themselves in a quandary when faced with the healing passages in the Gospels as a Sunday lection.

The African, on the other hand, shares a biblical world view which accepts healing and sickness as being more than physical phenomenon. The Western world is beginning to catch up in recent years with the advent of holistic medicine.

Africanized Christianity would encourage all of the church to recapture its ministry of healing, not by denying the great successes of scientific medicine, but by offering

the theological interpretation that, regardless of the means, healing comes from God. All Christians, therefore, should pray for such healing in worship and pray for it specifically through the laying on of hands and anointing with oil or holy water.

Above all else, the African Christian would invite everyone to believe again that, with God, all things are possible and, therefore, to pray.

#### Hymnody

"Music is a gift from the hearts of African Christians," stated a participant in a WCC worship workshop held in Harare in 1986.<sup>8</sup> While African Christian hymnody is still young, it is quite true that every African hymn written is a gift of the heart given to the larger church. This is especially true as contemporary hymn books of nearly every denomination reflect global Christianity.

European and American hymns have lost their monopoly. Today, there is a rich exchange of hymns from around the world. Although Robin Leaver recognizes that a hymn can only be fully appreciated within the culture from which it originated, he also states that this sharing of hymnody enriches all of the church and enables worshippers to deepen their spirituality and their understanding of God beyond what their parochial experience allows.<sup>9</sup>

#### Communality

The church can learn from African Christians regarding community or communality. This is important since the need

to establish true *koinonia* is paramount for the church world-wide.

In this section, community, communality, and *koinonia* are used interchangeably. There are slight nuances of difference, however. Community refers to both a specific group of persons and the state of such a grouping being united in mutual trust, support, and love. Communality describes a particular characteristic of the Africans which can prove to be a valuable contribution toward community for the whole church. *Koinonia*, translated from the Greek as participation or partnership, suggests both a quality of community and a means for that quality to be achieved. The usage of these terms will become clear as this study proceeds.

As has been mentioned several times now, a strong individualism prevails in the West. According to this world view, the individual is defined by what separates him or her from the group. An individual is defined by what makes him or her different from others.

Among the Africans, as discussed earlier, the world view is different. The individual is defined, not by what separates him or her from others, but by what unites him or her to the group. This sense of communality is essential to a person's identity.

John Mbiti, a Kenyan theologian, describes this sense this way:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his [or her] own being, his [or

her] own duties, his [or her] privileges and responsibilities towards himself [or herself] and towards other people. When he [or she] suffers, he or she] does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he [or she] rejoices, he [or she] rejoices not alone but with his [or her] kin[folk], his [or her] neighbours and his [or her] relatives whether dead or living.

The rabid individualism of the West has negative effects on the church. The church becomes a sort of cafeteria where people come as they please to take what they desire. The depth community can have is greatly diminished as a result. The church becomes merely a collection of individuals. Fellowship, not community, is what is fostered; fellowship being shallow friendliness while community involves a richer mutual trust, support and care.

In addition, the church's theology becomes centered around an individualistic soteriology. The world itself can, literally, go to Hell as long as the individual earns salvation. Salvation results in the individual going to heaven and not in heaven coming to earth.

In an attempt to build on this sensus communis of the Africans and to overcome the heresy of this individualistic approach to Christianity, some independent and mission churches in Africa have experimented with the use of basic communities.

An important contribution to the spread of basic communities in Africa was a book by Marie France Perrin-Jassy about the independent African churches operating among the Luo. These churches have been numerically successful largely because of their ability to

foster real community while the mission churches have failed to do so. Coming to Africa with a Western individualism, the missionaries neglected to utilize the very natural communality of the Africans. Her book, in offering the example of these churches, served to prod the mission churches into action towards utilizing basic communities.<sup>11</sup>

The African churches urge the world church on to an ecclesiology of trinitarian communality. It is a trinitarian-based ecclesiology which emphasizes *koinonia* while recognizing that true *koinonia* only occurs as a transcendent mission is actively participated in by the members of the community.

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a stumbling block for Western Christians. It is not too surprising that the father of this doctrine, Tertullian, was an African from Carthage (Tunis, Tunisia). While northern Africa today is classified as distinct from sub-Saharan Africa, this was less true in the past. Some writers have suggested that this de-Africanizing of northern Africa is the result of racism.<sup>12</sup>

While Western Christians struggle with the concept of the Trinity, Africans are quite at home with the reality of communality this doctrine represents. People do not exist as individuals, but only in relationship with others. In the same way, God exists only in community.

This trinitarian model is a good model for ecclesiology. If the disciples of Jesus are to imitate

Jesus, then Christians must imitate his communality with God and the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* must be the mark of the church.<sup>13</sup>

As noted above, this study uses the word *koinonia* because of its meaning as participation or partnership. Only as a person participates, does a person feel a real sense of belonging. Only in small face-to-face communities is everyone enabled to actively participate.<sup>14</sup>

Such participation, however, must be in more than just the inner workings of the group. There must be a transcendent purpose or mission for the group to participate in together. The members of Christian churches should be partners in the eschatological mission of God.

The result of such a trinitarian-based communal ecclesiology being put into practice would be a reinvention of the church, especially as those from the underside of life --- the least, the last, and the lost --- join the dialogue. It would literally result in what Leonardo Boff called "*ecclesiogenesis*."<sup>15</sup> While this is not yet fully achieved in the African churches, in the process of Africanizing, the African churches will have such a new beginning.

### Conclusion

This chapter has considered important contributions Africanized Christianity could make to the larger church. The study, as a whole, has looked at various factors that can contribute to liturgy that is truly Africanized; that

is, worship which is truly capable of coming from and responding to the African cultural and socio-political context.

Africanized worship will, by necessity, mean different things in the different cultures that make up Africa. In all, however, Africanized worship will be more than the addition of drums. Truly Africanized worship will be highly communal, will be sung and danced more than said and heard, will include healing, will be Holy Spirit oriented, and will communicate and help to inform theologies which are truly African in their approach. It will celebrate the African Christian's participation in God's mission of establishing the Reign of God and will face day-to-day issues of struggle, of victory, of defeat, and of hope despite defeat.

It is through liturgy that Christianity in Africa will best show that it has Africanized. Deusdedit R. K. Nkurunzinja states,

The efficacy of our African Christian theology... will be seen in the liturgy. If the liturgical celebrations are not tuned to the people's cultural background... the Church will be considered foreign.... If the liturgy, however, is a full expression of the life of the community, then Christianity will manifest itself as a truly indigenous and an effective presence within society and its transforming force.<sup>16</sup>

It is the hope of the author of this study that the mission churches in Africa will continue to develop liturgy filled with the breath, the flesh, and the blood of Africa.

African Christians, Alex Chima says, must discover God within its cultural and religious traditions and "make a



gift of its uniqueness for the enrichment of the ... whole church."<sup>17</sup> The task is enormous, but is essential. It is also God's will and shall be accomplished.

*"Ishe komborera Africa."*<sup>18</sup> "God bless Africa."

## NOTES

## Chapter 8

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Hillman, "An Evaluation of Inculturation," *African Ecclesial Review* 32 (Dec. 1990): 372.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Chima, 284.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> I-to Loh, ed., *African Songs of Worship* (Geneva: World Council of Churches: 1986), i.

<sup>9</sup> Leaver, 330-31.

<sup>10</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> This book's importance is noted in Joseph Kelly, "The Evolution of Small Christian Communities," *African Ecclesial Review* 33, no. 3 (1991): 110.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Randall C. Bailey, "Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives," in Cain Hope Felder, ed, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 165-68.

<sup>13</sup> Kakuba-Kapia, "A Theology of Fostering Ecclesial Community," *African Ecclesial Review* 33, no. 3 (1991), 124-25.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Deusdedit R. K. Nkurunzinza, "Liturgy: The Privileged Arena for Inculturation," *African Ecclesial Review* 27, no. 4 (Aug. 1985): 212.

<sup>17</sup> Chima, 290.

<sup>18</sup> This is "God bless Africa" in the Shona language.

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